Mrs Nichols

THE CANADA GOOSE

by J. C. M. Nichols

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-THIRD YEAR | FRIDAY, APRIL 22nd, 1955 | 1s 3d. WEEKLY

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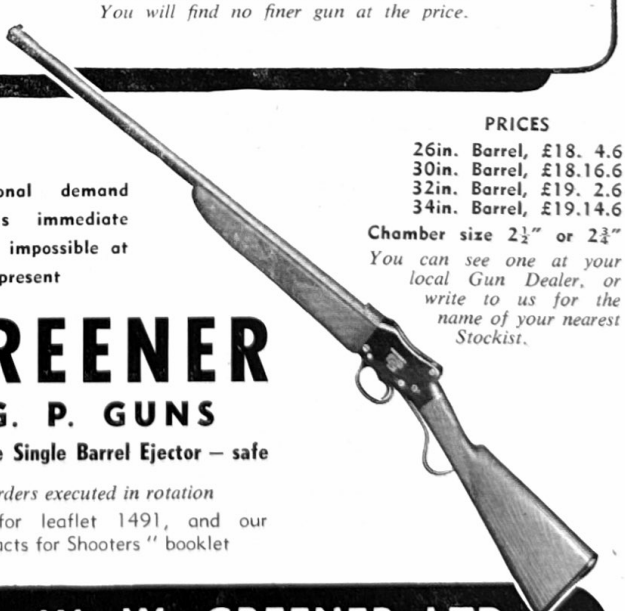

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

A CASE of considerable interest was decided in the House of Lords when a farmer who kicked over a rabbit trapper's snares had to pay £150. Their Lordships (Viscount Simonds, Lord Oaksey, Lord Morton, Lord Reid and Lord Keith) allowed this appeal by the plaintiffs, Mr. Eric Mason and the Shepton Mallet Transport Company Ltd., from a decision of the Court of Appeal on December 8, 1953, allowing an appeal by the defendant, Mr. J. M. Clarke, farmer, of Theddingworth, Leicestershire, from a judgment against him by Mr. Justice Croom-Johnson in an action by the plaintiffs claiming damages for breach of covenant and trespass.

In December, 1949, the company bought an estate, the defendant continuing as tenant of the fields which he used for grazing sheep under a tenancy agreement made in 1926 by which the landlords reserved "all the game, rabbits, wildfowl and fish with liberty for itself and all other persons authorised by it, to preserve, hunt, course, kill and carry away the same" and the defendant agreed "not to shoot or otherwise sport on the land." In October, 1950, the company orally leased the rabbiting rights to the first plaintiff, Mason, for a year. Rabbits became such a serious nuisance that the defendant agreed with the agricultural executive committee that they should gas rabbits in his hedgerows, and on various occasions in October and December, 1950, he ordered Mr. Mason off the land, kicked over snares laid in his fields by Mr. Mason, and authorised two men to go ferreting in the hedgerows.

In giving judgment Viscount Simonds said that it was clear law that the so-called reservation in the tenancy agreement operated as a re-grant of the rights therein described in favour of the landlord this assigns and that a *profit a prendre* was thereby created. The agreement between the company's agent and Mason on the rabbiting rights clearly showed that both parties meant Mason to have the right to kill ribbits by any lawful method and to take them away. Mason thus became entitled in equity to a *profit a prendre* — the right to enter on the farmer's land and kill rabbits there, and the farmer had no right to gainsay him. He had gone into possession of his *profit a prendre* so far as the subject-matter admitted of possession, by going round the estate with the company's bailiff, informing the occupant farmer of his position, and laying a large number of snares. And he had by the conduct of the farmer been debarred from exercising his rights.

It was pleaded that Mason had neither a legal right nor a right enforceable in equity to the *profit a prendre* and therefore could not complain of any interference with the exercise of his rights. It was true that he had no legal right, but his Lordship agreed with Lord Morton that Mason had a clear equitable title. Further, the slightest amount of possession of a *profit a prendre* was sufficient to support an action for trespass against a wrongdoer.

Evidence had been given that it was "normally done" to set snares where there were sheep, and that it was a common practice in the district and witnesses had never heard it suggested that it was an improper practice. It was true that a veterinary surgeon spoke of having had a labrador dog which had several times caught its leg in a snare, and that the respondent's daughter gave evidence that she had found a number of sheep with wires attached to their legs, but the trial judge concluded that it was a proper exercise of rabbiting rights to lay snares in fields where sheep pastured. In his Lordship's opinion he was undoubtedly right.

* * *

GUIANA EXPEDITION

In earlier days, expeditions organised by the Royal Zoological Society for collecting specimens were of no more than indirect interest to the general public, who could see the specimens only by visiting the Zoo when they were exhibited. The West African expedition was an example of how the life and work of collectors can be brought into the home through the medium of television. The present expedition to British Guiana should provide interesting TV films, for the Zoo collectors are again accompanied by B.B.C. representatives. It is anticipated that many rare specimens will be found, especially on the "lost world" plateau which, at a height of 9,000 feet, caps Mount Roriama. A specific object of the expedition is the capture of a hoatzin, a peculiar bird whose wing primaries end in claw-like appendages that enable it to clamber about trees. In 1931 the first (and only) hoatzin exhibited at Regent's Park died a few weeks after arrival.

DUCKS UNLIMITED

We have just heard that the 18th annual meeting of Ducks Unlimited, Inc., America's foremost migratory waterfowl conservation organisation, will be held in Reno, Nevada, on April 15 and 16. In addition to the members of D.U.'s Board of Trustees in the United States, Directors of its Canadian affiliate — D.U. (Canada) — will also be on hand for their 17th annual meeting of that organisation. Many of the nation's outstanding leaders in business and finance, all of whom serve without pay and defray their own expenses to attend the meeting, will be included among the seventy trustees and chairmen who have indicated their attention of being present in Reno. These sportsmen-conservationists will be representing practically every state in the union, and are keenly interested in the sport in their respective localities. During the past 17 years, American sportsmen have spent approximately $4,000,000 through D.U. for actual work of restoring the duck breeding grounds in the prairie provinces of Canada, and have been very gratified with the results of their investment. Federal funds cannot be spent for such purpose outside the nation's borders; therefore sportsmen, aware of the need of preserving the duck breeding grounds in Canada where 65% of the continent's wildfowl raise their young, contribute generously to D.U., the organisation dedicated to perpetuating the sport of duck shooting.

SWAN CENSUS

The rapid increase in number of swans in this country has led several interested bodies to organise a country-wide census of these birds—a census much more easily taken and much more likely to be approximately correct than are those taken of lesser birds. The organisers are the British Trust for Ornithology, supported by The Nature Conservancy, The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, and The Wildfowl Trust. Anglers are becoming worried (for obvious reasons) over the rise in the swan population, and they are gratified to hear that organisations whose principal object is bird conservation are alive to the fact that swans are aggressive birds which may well drive away from eligible sites comparatively rare birds that might otherwise nest there. "Swan-upping" on the Thames ensures a fairly accurate knowledge of the number of swans on that river, and it is said that the swans have rather more than doubled their numbers since 1948.

DEE AUCTION

Two stretches of salmon water on the river Dee, part of the estate of the late Major-General Sir James Burnett, fetched £39,900 at an Aberdeen auction which lasted only nine minutes. The Lower Crathes beat, which is 1¾ miles long and has five pools, was bought for £28,200. In the past ten years it yielded 1,548 salmon and 145 sea-trout. The one-mile-long Kinniskie stretch was bought for £11,700 by the owner of the fishing rights from the opposite bank. This stretch has four pools and yielded 938 salmon and 105 sea-trout in the previous ten years. The opening bids for the two stretches were £20,000 and £9,000 respectively.

COVER PICTURE

Gela, an intermewed eyass peregrine falcon (the subject of our cover picture this week), was flown at grouse in the seasons 1952 and 1953. She was lost in October 1953. In the previous winter, she had lived in a London flat. As a game falcon she was a little on the small side, but her "waiting-on" and straight stooping left nothing to be desired. She was, in fact, the best her owner, Mr. Geoffrey Pollard, had ever seen, though her successor, The Bitch, shows signs of becoming her equal. The portrait is painted from life and is an astonishing resemblance.

A MORNING AT HOME

by Tower-Bird

THE seventh day, for me, is a day of work, albeit not of the manual kind. I usually spend it writing this page and other odd "pieces" and replying to a number of letters. Last Sunday, however, I found myself with a clear morning, and decided to set about "spring cleaning" after the shooting season.

Now, I live in a cottage so small that you would honestly have difficulty in swinging the proverbial cat round your head in it. Apart from a down-stairs bath-room-cum-scullery, there are only two rooms on ground level—a very small sitting-room, and a slightly larger kitchen. It is a very old cottage, set above the wide expanse of the marshes, and is said to have been much used by smugglers. Some of the walls are very thick, and I wonder at times whether there are any bodies of excise men bricked up in them!

This is, or was at one time, good smuggling country. But not so very far away, where I spend a good deal of time fowling, smuggling is by no means a sport of the past. Indeed, one early morning during the past season, as I lay prone in some cover just below high tide mark, an excise man on patrol came so close to me that I could almost have grabbed his legs. His far-seeing eyes were not, seemingly, focussed on the area round his feet!

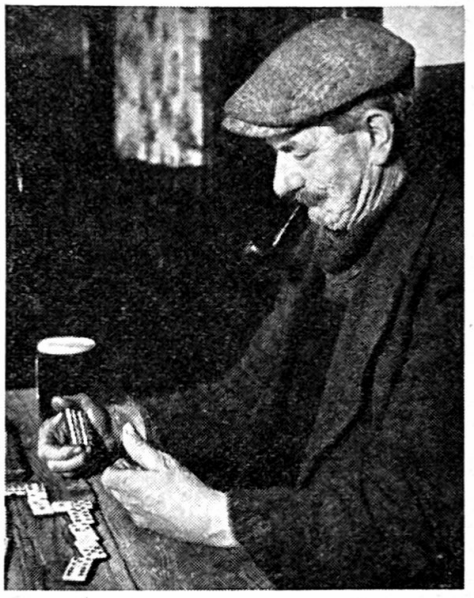
I was told, soon after I came to Sussex, that the reticence of the average native was due almost entirely to an hereditary instinct to avoid "too much talk," especially to non-natives, and simply because smuggling was a veritable industry at a period not so very long past. Be that as it may, the experienced fowler, and the smuggler, though their "sport" may not be the same, have this in common: they can be dumb, or they know how to drag a red-herring.

Sporting Fixtures

Though my cottage is tiny, when, on this morning, I went to sort out fowling and other tackle, I soon discovered that it was not a job to be finished in five minutes. For, while I do not "advertise my trade," I do like to see some of my shooting stuff round me all the year round. In the sitting-room are some small, framed paintings by my old friend J. C. M. Nichols, of Pagham and Chichester Harbours, and two of these take pride of place—one a view of the former harbour painted some years ago; the other, a corner of some saltings in Chichester Harbour, showing a punt containing two fowlers, one of which has just brought off a nice shot with his 8-bore shoulder gun at mallard. My favourite painting of J.C,M.'s, which I have yet to have framed, is one of thousands of wigeon on and over the marshes below this cottage. It is painted in great and accurate detail.

The only other "wall-ornaments" consist of a fine photographic study of Don, and a colour calendar of mallard dropping into a reedy pool by moonlight, sent to me last Christmas by my friend Bert Smith who, till I moved to Sussex, lived next door to me and was keeper on a Berkshire estate. Also, a stuffed peregrine in a glass-case, on the top of which case sits my prize mallard drake decoy, with real tail-feathers curling up behind. On the top of the little side-board are two more duck decoys, with, between them, my eight pigeon decoys which, fitted into each other, look like a single bird. On the tiny book-case, is a stand of three silhouette curlew decoys. These things I like to have round me the year through. The full cartridge-belt hanging down a yard from the fire-place about completes the "sporting fixtures," unless one counts the small "jungle" of African carved animals (carved by natives) which adorns the mantlepiece. Each Christmas a new species is sent to me by a reader of *The Shooting Times* who is a game warden in the Dark Continent.

On this morning of clearance, then, there was little to do in the sitting-room, except to have a rake through the cupboard, and to remove, by stern order, a number of cartridge boxes which littered my desk. The kitchen, however, was a different matter, for here I had made free use of two chairs and a china-cupboard for much of my tackle, while my own particular corner was the main target for operations. On the mantle-piece above the kitchen range sit six duck decoys, a year-



With wildfowling and dominoes out, vermin killing and gardening are in!

through ornament, except when they are afloat.

My first job was to take my fowling jacket upstairs and hang it in a moth-proof, plastic bag. Next came my sea-boots into which, during the past weeks, a succession of newspaper had been stuffed and withdrawn; these also went upstairs, to hang at full length on the door beside my bed. A fine pair of salmon-waders (rubberised canvas, I fancy) were collected from a chair and put away, together with washed fowling stockings. These waders are useful in many ways. Before real fowling weather sets in, they can be used under wellingtons. One comes to deep water that would fill the latter; the wellingtons are slipped off, and carried, and the breast-high waders come into use. Later, when worn under sea-boots, they are nice and warm, and one can sit down happily on a mud bank of the saltings without getting a wet seat. One can also take off the sea-boots and use the waders when the water would pour into the former.

Special Corner

And now I come to *the* corner in which hang an old well-camouflaged gas-cape, warrior of many outings; a strong canvas duck decoy carrier through the straps of which the arms can be slipped and the bag settled comfortably on one's shoulders; a canvas leg-o'-mutton gun case; my one-and-only game (and fowling) bag, made from an old green kit-bag; two "fox traps"; some rabbit traps; mole traps; an assortment of "humane rabbit traps" which I had for experiment; a great bird's-nest of wire snares; bundles of cord and string; a game carrier, etc.

Having sorted out the traps, tying them into neat bundles and re-hanging them, I sat down to unravel the multitude of snares—some of my own, but a great many which I had taken from poachers. No use for these now, but I always like to take a few with me in my game-bag for wiring up things. Many I now discarded as frayed; the rest I tied into an "organised" bundle, and hung them with the traps.

Lucky-Dip Bag

Then came the game-bag. The assortment of things taken from a school-boy's pocket has nothing on what I found in this bag. Apart from a veritable lining of mixed feathers (pheasant, duck, pigeon, moorhen, etc.) which had stuck to its interior, there were a dozen and more hanks of cord, string, wire, small pegs, and some oddments picked up on the edge of the tide which "might come in useful." There were two old paper bags in which I had carried apples; two pieces of rag which I could use to get the water out of Don's ears after he had been "to sea"; there were two grey squirrel tails, the legs of a sparrow-hawk, and a small compass for which I had searched everywhere. I am, by nature, a fairly tidy fellow, but, when one is out from dawn to dusk during January and part of February, one seems to get little time to clear out one's game-bag, except to relieve it of the bodies of shot birds.

There are some "weapons of offence" which are not put away at the end of the season—to wit the gun, the telescope, cartridges, wellington boots, game-carrier (used for pigeon), etc., and these I now looked over, giving the gun a special clean and oiling, and sorting out many cartridges in many boxes. Meanwhile, Don sat as close to me as he could, or followed me when I rose, his nose glued to my legs. His unblinking eyes stared at me like two brown saucers, and it was obvious that his mind was one huge question mark. Was there something really big in the offing? Or was everything going to be packed up and sold? And those questions remained with him what time (due to the "dust" we had created getting down our throats) we left the cottage and walked to the old inn (happily close by) which itself was once a smuggler's nest.

Although there is still plenty of shooting to done—pigeon shooting and the destruction of vermin, especially crows—I do not pretend that the close season is pleasant to me. I look forward with keen eagerness to the end of the summer; to the time when two of us will have a boat and trailer ready to launch on salt water. To the time when the mallard, and the odd teal which rise from dyke and gutter and pond on our inland marshes are fair game. When the duck come to the barley stubbles, or flight across the saltings. When one can bring home a small bundle of sea-snipe (redshank) and taste again that faint salt tang which is salt to my meat.

* * *

I have, since writing the above, spent the Easter week-end on the prowl—pigeon and crow shooting. On the morning of Good Friday I saw two large flights of martins over some marsh meadows. But the weather, despite short spells of warm sunshine, was spoiled by cold winds and some rain. One early morning, while decoying pigeon on an exposed hill-top, I nearly froze to death.

A marsh keeper cutting reeds.

A Shooting Paradise—XIX

by J. Wentworth Day

MY particular interest, however, in going to Somerleyton was to visit the famous Fritton decoy. It is, to my mind, the loveliest lake in the south of England. It is also one of the very few duck decoys which are still maintained in full working order. So, with the kind permission of Lord Somerleyton and under the benevolent wing of Captain Flatt, his estate agent, I set out for the decoy.

Now the decoy is only a small part of Fritton Lake, for the lake is two and a half miles long, and, I should guess, more than a quarter of a mile wide. Deep woods march down to the reed-bordered banks. In those woods, standing tall as coloured tapestries on their sandy hillsides, once nested the osprey and the white-tailed eagle, the spoonbill and the cormorant. You may still see a cormorant any day of the year and an osprey on rare occasions, but the days of the latter's nesting have vanished.

The lake is very deep in parts, full of large pike and immense eels. Pike of 30lb. and more have been taken out more than once, and the eels, an ancient liar informed me are "as thick as me leg and bark like dogs." At the decoyman's cottage hidden in a thicket of oaks, fir trees, and rhododendrons, I found the decoyman—a young, keen, athletic east-coastman named Walter Mussett.

A Famous Essex Family

Now there is only one family of Mussetts in the Eastern Counties and they all come from Essex. Descendants of Huguenot settlers who fled to Essex after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, they have been for generations, and still are, keen-eyed, hawk-like men, living with one foot on land and one in the water. Smack owners, oyster dredgers, yacht hands and yacht skippers, inshore and deep-sea fishermen, wildfowlers, marsh keepers and poachers! That is the long and honourable record of the Mussett family, so many of whom I have counted as good sporting friends in winter forays on tideline and saltings. There was never a Mussett yet who could not sail a boat, shoot straight, and drink any other man under the table. It was heartening to find one of the clan, up here in the north-easternmost corner of Suffolk in charge of one of the last duck decoys in Britain. That is the sort of thing one would expect of that remarkable family.

"Come you on, sir, and I'll show you an old shellie's nest right away. She deserves a medal, that bird! Do you believe me when I tell you that she still kept sitting on her eggs when I felled a fir tree that fell straight on top of her! And she's there today. Come you on!"

Off we went down a sandy lane, rhododendron-bordered, through an open wood of fir and pine and oak, where rabbits scuttled and pigeons clattered. Suddenly the gleam of water broke like silver through the far, sun-reddened trunks of the trees. "There lies Fritton Lake," said young Mussett, in much the same way as Cortez might have declaimed from his peak in Darien: "Behold—the Pacific!"

The Laughing Duck

We walked towards the lake, glittering below us, over a soft carpet of pine needles and leaf-mould. Rabbits titupped away, their white scuts flickering through the bracken. A whiter patch, larger, edged by bright chestnut, moved suddenly behind a tree trunk. It appeared the other side, waddled across an open space, took suddenly to wind and, sweeping up in a bold flash of colour between the tree tops, resolved itself into a shelddrake. The great, gaudy duck, red and white and chestnut, flew round over us, barely skimming the tree-tops, laughing that ghastly laugh which sailors and inshore fishermen will tell you is the laughter of drowned seamen waiting for their mates to join them in the dim green alleys of Fiddlers Green, where all dead sailors go.

"His old mate isn't far off," remarked Mussett, as he strode into a tangled thicket of bracken, fir trees, brambles, and broken branches where the prone trunk of a great fir had caused havoc. He bent down, pulled aside some bracken fronds and there sitting on a snug down-lined nest full of eggs, was the mother shelduck. The top of her head actually touched the fallen tree trunk. On the instant, she shuffled through a run-way the other side of the trunk and took wing.

"There! Look you now," said Mussett. "When we cut that tree down she sat on the nest all the time while the men were chopping and sawing a yard or two away—we didn't know she was there, of course—and then when it fell it came down crack on top of her! But, Lord bless you, she'll hatch that little lot off, safe enough. We should have a lot more shellies on this lake if it wasn't for the carrion crows and the ordinary crows. They kill 'em off by the dozen. I'd like to shoot every carrion crow there is. They're the enemies of all young birds."

"Do the cormorants still breed here, Wally?" I asked. "They always did for a thousand years or more and it would be a pity if they left you now."

Visiting Osprey

"Well, I reckon they still breed here," Mussett replied. "I've seen some rare big old nests with the bird sitting on them. I've seen as many as 70 cormorants sitting on one tree at a time. Why, they actually killed one tree up at the top of the lake with their stinking whitewash. But there, you never know what's going to turn up on this lake or in these big woods. We had an osprey here two years ago. He was up on the common day after day and you could see him fishing in this lake almost any time. He used to drop from the sky like a bullet and take a big fish out of the water like a flash. I suppose you wouldn't believe me if I told you that Captain Flatt killed an otter and a rabbit at one shot in 1945?"

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, the otter was dragging the rabbit down the bank into the water. He'd collared the rabbit and was going to make a meal of it. So Captain Flatt ups with his gun, bowls the otter over, and finished off the old rabbit at the same time. When people say otters only kill fish and don't do any harm to game, they don't know what they're talking about. An otter will kill any amount of wild duck, coot, and moorhens. He'll carry off a rabbit as soon as look at it and he'll kill and eat a cock pheasant.

"I've known them do it in hard weather," I put in.

"'Zactly! Those old otters would clean your hen run up if they got in! Why, I've even heard of 'em killing tame geese. You know, sir, I never get tired of watching birds and animals. Why, do you know, we've got a red deer stag loose in these woods. He's been running around here wild for months. Don't know where he comes from, but he's settled down nicely. Only wish he'd find himself a wife and then we'd soon have a herd of deer in here. His Lordship's wonderful interested in him and wouldn't have him touched for anything.

"That old stag takes a mud-bath in a half-dry dyke down by the decoy pond every morning. I can see where he's been wallowing when I come along early. He'll be all right so long as he keeps along with us here. But there, would you believe me if I told you that I'd caught a hawk with my cap?"

"A full-winged hawk?"

"Yes, yes! That was a kestrel. She had a nest in the top of the mill an' as you know, when those old kestrels have a nest of young ones, they'll take all the pheasant chicks and young partridges they can clap claws on. Just for a few weeks they're real murderers. The rest of the year they do more good than harm. Well, this old kestrel, she was a proper terror. I couldn't get nigh her with a gun, but I knew she had a nest in the top of the mill, so I sneaked up a ladder one day, in my stockinged feet, crept along by the big beam, where she had her nest, and clapped my hat on her quick before she could move. That stopped her capers! But there—catching hawks with your cap! I'd never do that again in a thousand years."

(Continued on the following page)

Gun Gossip

by North Country

I AM very pleased to have from the *Conseil International De La Chasse* in Paris a copy of their *Reunion De Dusseldorf* (October 15-19, 1954). I would recommend readers who are interested in field sport from the general European angle to obtain copies of this publication from the Secrétariat Général, 5, Rue de Pomereu, Paris (16e).

Another little publication which has come to hand is *Shooting (Shot Gun)* in *Know the Game* series, which is produced in collaboration with the British Field Sports Society, and published by Educational Productions Ltd., 17 Denbigh Street, London, S.W.1 (price 2s. net). This is an attractive production and it is usefully informative, containing details of a rather general character that shooting men need to know. For example there are sections on gun mechanism, proof marks, gun fitting, maximum range, pattern density, aiming, footwork, safety rules, safety in the field, seasons, clay pigeon shooting, gun cleaning and so on—good value indeed for the money. I would have preferred to see "Safety Rules" put right at the beginning of the book, as I feel that this is the most important matter of all. And I do not know that I quite agree with the statement that the smaller the bore more accurate the marksmanship must be. It is true that at very close ranges a small bore, boring for boring, will shoot a bit closer pattern than a 12. But at general ranges there is little to choose between a 12-bore and small-bore in pattern spread— thus the lessened *density* of the small-bore pattern. So it is not a question of the range at which clean kills may be made. This is something that the shooter should find out for himself, so that he will know just what can and what cannot be done with his particular gun. However, this is an attractive and useful production, containing information for both young and old and a number of illustrations.

Talking of safety, it is pointed out in this booklet that the chief danger in driving comes in taking a shot in front and then swinging round to take another behind. For if the bird in front happened to be a low or fairly low one, this would almost certainly mean swinging the gun more or less in line with your colleagues on the right or left. But I do not think that it is always necessary to lower the gun in this movement. It can be kept at the shoulder or at shoulder level, the barrels being lifted with the left hand so that they are pointing upwards and well clear of any human being. In this way it should be easier to pick up the line of another bird behind—and quicker. I am referring to conditions under which the line of guns is on level ground. For at times in, say, grouse shooting the line of butts is far from being on level ground.

For the high pheasant which has passed over and which is departing straight behind at *high* level I have not found that a downward swing is very effective. Moreover a downward swing can so easily deteriorate into a kind of "poking" action—which is hopeless. This is, I know, not a generally popular shot and at big shoots with numbers of birds coming forward there is often no need to take such birds. You can have all the shooting you can cope with in front. But at small shoots when every bird at every angle is of value it may be necessary to shoot at such birds. I would not like to seem to be dogmatic over a difficult matter and I dare say, anyway, that some men pull off this shot in one way and others in another way. My way is to bring the gun up under the bird—in other words to make a kind of upward swing. This is an easier action altogether and one that I would suggest others might try. Of course it is necessary to fire well before the bird has been blotted out—otherwise a clean miss is almost certain. I know this shot is not a popular one, but there is no need to make excuses about not wanting to shoot pheasants up the tail. Nobody surely wants to do this.

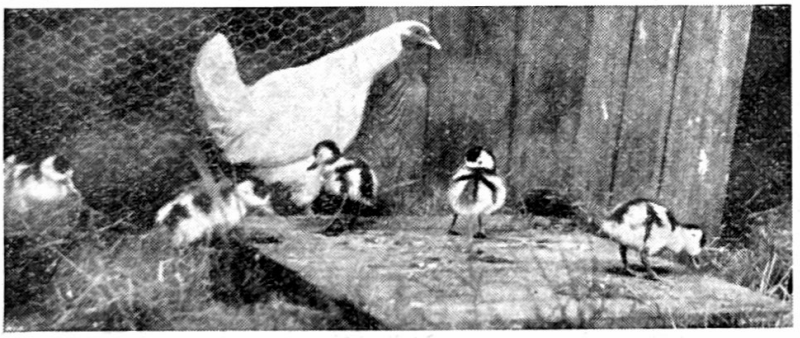
Angles come into shooting very largely and exercise a great influence over results. There are circumstances under which you are actually limited to firing "up the tail." You may get a series of shots at an angle at which you are naturally weak and miss the lot. Or the reverse may happen. These are the hazards of field sport and all help to create interest and add flavour.

☆ ☆ ☆

A Shooting Paradise

(Continued from previous page)

We walked on down through the sun-dappled alleys of the pines, came to a logging road through the silent wood, and there, a hundred yards away, lay a reedy bay framed in sallows. Beyond, danced and glittered the shining vista of the lake, stretching into the golden afternoon sunshine, until it melted two miles away in a blue haze of hanging woods.



Young sheldduck with foster-mother bantam.

Wally Mussett waved his hand as a hen pheasant suddenly clattered up at our feet.

"I recollect a hen pheasant that took over a partridge's nest after the old hen partridge had been killed," he said. "That pheasant, she sat on those partridge eggs, addled a couple of 'em, but hatched the rest off and brought the lot up."

We reached the shore of the little reedy bay. A reed-walled, reed-thatched boathouse, looking as old as Time, crouched under a great spreading oak. The landward end of rough-hewn boards, cut straight from the tree, was tarred, and shone blackly in the sun. Mussett took out a key, unlocked a padlock fit to seal the Tower of London and we stepped into the golden gloom of the cobwebbed old boathouse whose floor of clear water shimmered to the sudden dart of a shoal of tiny roach. A dozen or more duck decoys hung from hooks on the walls or stood on shelves, mute memories of many a frosty winter's morn, when the sun came up over the trees like a ball of fire, and the duck were coming in like bullets from the sea, pitching to the decoys in upflung foam.

We boarded one of those double-ended marshman's boats which are built like miniature barges. They are the best of all knockabout boats for marsh waterways, for you can pole them in either direction, row them with ease, fish or shoot from them with comfortable stability, and load them with anything from men and dogs to "shooves" of reeds. They are, indeed, reed-cutters' boats first and foremost, but for general all-round work, there is nothing to beat them. I have no doubt that with a small lug sail and a steering oar they could be made to sail.

Pushing out from the boatshed the full glory of the lake burst upon us. It stretched like a crooked, glittering sword between tall embosoming woods. Along the shores, the umber of dead winter reeds blended with the faint green of the young springtime growth. Here and there, larger reed-beds stretched out in the water, covering acres at a time.

(To be continued next week)

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Apr. 23: Hayfield G.C., near Stockport. Members' Shoot, 2 p.m.

Apr. 23: Sussex Skeet Championship, Eastbourne G.C.

Apr. 27: Wetherby and Dist. G.C., Yorks. Evening practice.

April 30: Sussex Down-the-Line Championship at Goodwood, Nr. Chichester, Sussex.

Apr. 30: South Wales D.T.L. Championship, organised by the Welsh C.P.S.A.

May 1: Harrogate G.C., Yorks. Members' Shoot, 1.45 p.m.

May 1: Surrey D.T.L. Championship, Bisley G.C., Brookwood, 10.30 a.m.

May 1: Moving Target Rifle Trial Shoot, in conjunction with Bisley Gun Club. Visitors welcome.

May 6 and 7: 23rd Annual British Open Sporting Championship (organised by the C.P.S.A.), West London Shooting Grounds, Northolt, Greenford, Middlesex, 9.30 a.m.

* * *

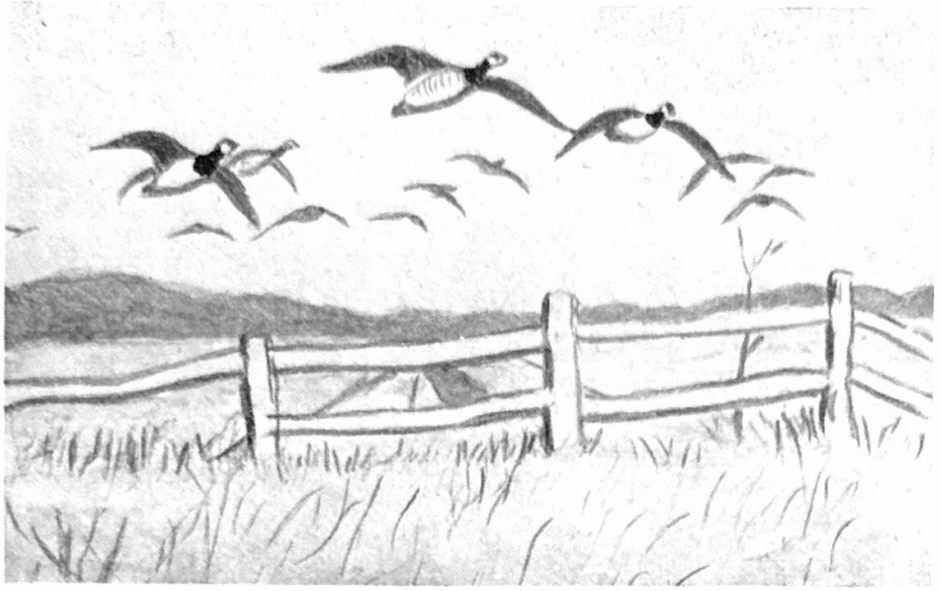
Reports and Results

A popular event amongst gamekeepers is the annual clay pigeon competition organised by Gallyon & Sons Ltd., at their shooting ground at Madingley, Cambridge. There were 97 entries for the Gaybird Golden Pheasant Competition, and shooting was of a high standard, making it necessary to shoot off several ties before it was decided that Mr. G. Watker of Hoveton, Norfolk, with a score of 88 x 100, was the winner. Mr. H. Starling of Enstone, Oxfordshire, is to be congratulated, making the highest aggregate score over the three competitions, and winning the Silver Partridge Challenge Trophy with 199 x 225 points.

Mr. Fred. B. Taylor was chief guest at a lunch provided for the gamekeepers and their friends. In a few words of welcome, Mr. T. N. Gallyon said how pleased he was to see so many keepers who had been attending the shoot for a number of years. In fact, they had present one headkeeper who attended the first shoot 29 years ago. This meant that they enjoyed not only the shooting, but meeting one another year by year. Major A. W. Neve thanked the organisers for the facilities arranged for the Gamekeepers' Association.

The umpiring arrangements were in the capable

(Continued on opposite page, col. 3)



Canada geese coming low across the marshes.

The Canada Goose

by J. C. M. Nichols

ALTHOUGH the stock of Canada geese to be found in this country are, without doubt, the descendants of birds introduced during the last century, they have now become so numerous, in a truly final state, as to merit inclusion in the list of our British wildfowl. Largest of all the geese (a good gander will weigh 14 or even 15 lb.) they are easily distinguished by their black necks and white "cravats."

Our scientists have divided the various forms of black-necked Canadian geese into no less than eight different species, or sub-species which would appear to differ in little except size, ranging from the typical Canadian (*Branta Canadensis* as above), to the cackling goose (*Branta Canadensis minima*), which is scarcely larger than a mallard duck.

All our "English" black-necks would appear to be exclusively of the largest species, which is found on the Atlantic coast of Canada and the U.S.A., but the geese which frequent the prairie lakes of S. Saskatchewan are doubtless of one of the medium-sized varieties.

In his twenty years experience of farming and sport in the neighbourhood of Battleford, N.W.T., my brother Charles never shot a goose that weighed more than some 7 or 8 lb. i.e. the weight of a really good grey goose and no more.

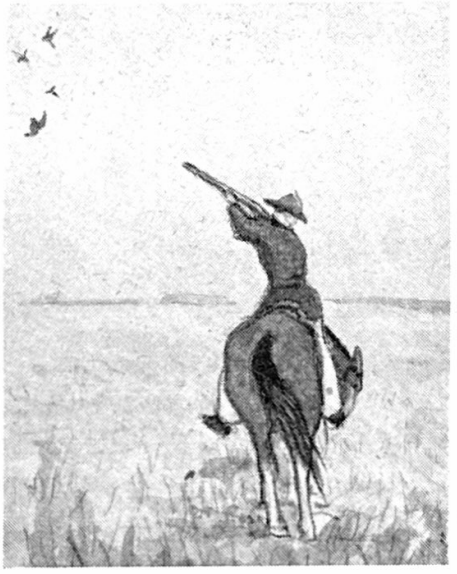
In some seasons, in September and early October, they were very plentiful, frequenting the wheat stubbles as long as there was any corn left for them to glean.

Ways and Means of Shooting

As for the ways and means of shooting them, we used to flight the geese morning and evening, and I have, on occasion, got a shot from the saddle at a small bunch when out on the feed. My method was to circle the geese at a walk, gradually closing on them, and then when their heads go up, gallop in on them and take the shot. Of course, you must have a horse that understands the game, and will stop and stand as soon as you drop the reins. To shoot a flying bird from a *moving* horse is feat which is almost beyond the practical.

But by far the deadliest way of making a bag of geese is to shoot them on their feeding grounds with decoys set out about twenty yards to your front, and some Canadian professionals are adept at calling them also.

Though possessing their fair share of caution at most times, I have known these geese to act downright foolish when working to decoys. Thus, one morning about 8 a.m. (clear daylight) I had a successful double shot at about



A shot from the saddle.

fifty black-necks which simply circled the field and back to the decoys again, giving me just time enough to reload one barrel and secure a third goose! I might add as a point of interest that my decoys on this occasion were only flat silhouettes and painted as for grey geese.

I once nearly (but not quite) obtained a very cheap goose. He came flying down a narrow lake and not more than thirty yards high, when suddenly spotting me, he swerved and crashing into the top of a big pine tree, came down like a stone. I had almost closed hand on him when he spread his great wings and made a clean get-away.

To return to home country, the Canada geese now to be found in various parts of the eastern counties are said to have been introduced many years ago by Lord Suffield at Gunton park, from whence they colonised Lord Leicester's marshes at Holkham, where they are now more numerous than ever.

On the other hand, the grey geese (bean, pink-footed, and white-footed) for which the Holkham marshes had been famous for well over a century would seem for several years past to have completely deserted that part of West Norfolk.

In all its habits the Canadian closely resembles the greylag goose, especially in its preference for fresh water lakes etc. (as opposed to salt water) and feeding on sweet marsh grasses with seasonable visits to the upland barley and wheat stubbles. I have more than once seen a greylag or two flying with a flock of Canadian geese for companionship sake.

Canadian geese are among the fastest birds that fly, and when once well-started with the wind under their tails they can easily outstrip many smaller and apparently faster birds. Except when on a migration flight, they seldom come at any great height, and when flying low are into the gun and gone again like a pack of driven grouse, while their great size makes them a more deceptive target to judge for pace and range. The voice of the Canada goose is unmistakable a deep *hornk-honk*.

On the table, if treated right, he is a worthy bird indeed. Hang him for a fortnight more or less according to weather, stuff and roast, with the usual fixings.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

(Continued from facing page)

hands of Colonel McDonald Burns, Mr. Andrew Wylie, Mr. A. E. Curtis, Mr. Gerald Clowser and Mr. A. G. Duke, whilst the squading and statistical arrangements were in the equally able hands of Mr. W. H. Castle and Sgt. H. Holden. At the conclusion of the meeting Mr. F. B. Taylor presented the prizes as follows :

Event No. 1 (possible 100 points) Gaybird Golden Pheasant Competition. 1st, The Gaybird Golden Pheasant Challenge Trophy, together with £5 added, winner, G. Watker, Hoveton, Norfolk, 88 points ; 2nd, £3, winner, H. Starling, Enstone, Oxon., 88 ; 3rd, £1, winner, W. F. Bishop, Clay, Norfolk, 88 ; 4th, 10s., winner, L. Chambers, Anglesey Abbey, Cambs., 85 ; consolation prize, cleaning outfit, winner, G. Biggs, Watford, Herts., 30.

Event No. 2 (possible 75 points) Silver Pheasant Competition. 1st, Solid Silver Pheasant Challenge Trophy and £15 15s., winner, H. Starling, Enstone, Oxon., 71 ; 2nd, Dwight Challenge Cup and £10 10s., winner, H. C. French, Brook, Nr. Newport, Isle of Wight, 65 ; 3rd, £6 6s., winner, H. F. Norris, Woburn Park, Bucks., 61 ; 4th, £4 4s., winner, R. Saunders, Kimberley Park, Wymondham, Norfolk, 61 ; 5th, £3 3s., winner, C. Percy, Alresford, Hants., 60 ; 6th, £2 2s. and one pair of shooting mittens, winner, T. G. Norris, Westoning, Beds., 60 ; 7th, £2 2s., winner, B. W. Wells, Dumbleton, Worcs., 60 ; 8th, one tankard, winner, A. T. North, Wimborne, Dorset, 59 ; 9th, one gamekeeper's knife, winner, J. Marshall, Sedgeford, King's Lynn, 58 ; 10th, £1 1s., winner, D. Smith, Morton-in-the-Marsh, 58 ; consolation prize, one aim corrector, winner, A. R. Martin, Little Bedwyn, Wilts., 11.

Event No. 3 (possible 50 points) Gamekeepers' Association Competition. Perpetual Challenge Trophy and £1 1s., winner, J. H. Starling, Enstone, Oxon., 46. Honorary and Headkeeper Members : 1st, £2, winner, J. H. Starling, Enstone, Oxon., 46 ; 2nd, £1, winner, W. Mattin, Stetchworth, Newmarket, 45 ; 3rd, 10s., winner, H. F. Norris, Woburn Park, Beds., 45. Underkeeper Members : 1st, £2, winner, P. Shaw, Attleborough, Norfolk, 45 ; 2nd, £1, winner, C. Stewart, Slapton, Nr. Kettering, 43 ; 3rd, 10s., winner, H. Starling, Enstone, Oxon., 40 ; consolation prize, tankard, winner, J. R. Miles, Corby, Northants, 10.

Special Challenge Trophy. The "Cromlix" Solid Silver Partridge Trophy awarded for the best aggregate score over events 1, 2, and 3, comprising 45 birds in all, winner, H. Starling, Enstone, Oxon., 199. Special Challenge Cup. The "James" Solid Silver Challenge Cup, together with £1 1s., awarded for the second best aggregate score over events 1, 2 and 3, winner, H. F. Norris, Woburn Park, Bucks., 189.

EAST WINDS

by Dunbird

ALTHOUGH I have watched, listened, and read almost all about the "battle of the brent," I have kept a relatively still tongue, and, I hope, a level head—in spite of the fact that the brent has occupied a great deal of my time up and down the coast and in particular in the Blackwater estuary. Not having greylag, pink-footed and white-fronted near and handy, all the excitement and romance of goose shooting has, with me, gone into the little black goose, and I have closely followed its rise and fall—and I believe its rise again—for a number of years. Whether the Blackwater is a sufficiently good thermometer to indicate its status all over the country, I would not be prepared to say. Certain it is that the Blackwater and brent have always been associated, and some of the greatest bags of black geese have been made, in the past, on its wide mud flats.

During the decline and—so far as this river is concerned—disappearance of the *zos.*, the brent, which previously numbered countless thousands, dwindled to almost nothing. Unfortunately, during the war years I was far away from the muds—though fortunately for quite a time with the grey geese of the north—and I cannot say with any authority what was the position at this time. From what I have heard, the brent began to come back in increasing numbers.

However, when I was demobilised it was once more possible to see for myself, and I was tremendously pleased with what I saw. After the dearth, the numbers seemed veritable plenty, though they did not approach the pre-*zostera*-disease period.

Although the *zos.* is still thin on the flats, there seems every indication that it, too, is regaining its foothold; but what is, I think, far more significant is that brent, perhaps in a struggle for survival, have acclimatised themselves to a wider range of food. Now they readily eat the green "dulse" which is plentiful in the river, and have been seen grazing short grass like their grey relatives. Last winter there were something like six thousand brent in the estuary, which is lower than peak years, but still a very worth-while stock.

Increase of Rats

From seeming scarcity to plenty, I imagine that it is many years since there have been so many rats in evidence as during the present time. In spite of a heavy poisoning programme one farm in the locality, whilst threshing this week, had fifty out of one rick. Every bank and disused rabbit warren has its quota, and those few who still have ferrets have been able to keep their hand in and have helped to reduce the invasion.

Recently, a farmer phoned to ask whether rats were ever killed by gulls, as he had just come in from threshing during which a pack of mixed gulls had been attending operations, pouncing on the escaping mice as they left the rick. I think that there is little doubt that gulls following the plough do not confine their attentions only to worms and other relatively inanimate food turned up, but will catch and kill field voles and wood mice which may be bustled from below ground by the burrowing shares. Perhaps the habit of attending threshing operations may be an extension of this mouse-catching, but whether they would tackle a rat is probably rather doubtful, especially as most of the plough followers are black-headed and herring gulls. Certainly a lesser- or a great black-back could, but they do not usually form part of the company behind the tractor and would be unlikely to come near enough to noisy threshing tackle to be of much use.

Having watched the first onslaught of myxomatosis through its various revolting stages in quite a number of widely-separated areas in this part of the county, I have been struck with one thing which appears to have been common to all. This is the apparent disappearance of hares from districts in which the disease is raging. Many of these areas normally carry a good head of hares and it does not require great powers of observation to see them frequently at most times of the year. Their absence is, therefore, all the more noticeable. This reduction in their numbers gave rise, I believe, to the numerous stories that the hare was being thinned out by the disease along with the rabbits. But once myxomatosis had burned itself out, and the ground was once more clear of corpses, the hares began to come back, in some cases in greater numbers (possibly augmented by hares from near-by districts in which the rabbits were still dying). I offer no explanation for this, nor do I suggest that it has happened in other counties, but it certainly appears to have been so here.

The crab apple tree, with its opposite number facing it across the field. The cabbage "stretch" lies between.

During the recent snow I was active with the gun on pigeon pinned down on a "stretch" of cabbage on which two thousand odd were feeding for a time. As the snow cleared and opened up the clovers once more, most of them passed on or concentrated their attentions elsewhere. One small bunch of about fifty birds remained and provided a nice problem a few mornings ago. The problem was not so much the trouble of getting to grips with them, but the question of how long is a pigeon's memory?

The Two Crab Apple Trees

This particular day threshing was in progress near the top of the field, and it kept the birds at the lower end where there was a hide within gunshot of a crab apple tree on which they often settle before sliding down among the cabbage. Far across the field there is another crab of much the same height. I had not been in the hide long (having approached it out of sight in a deep ditch) before the small pack flew steadily across the field, some dropping direct into the cabbage, but many more alighting on the top of the crab. From these I killed a bird and the whole lot departed to settle on the crab at the other side of the field.

A Repeat Performance

Not having a watch with me, I lit a cigarette and waited with the birds in full view, huddled against the wind on the distant tree. Finishing one cigarette I lit another and was half-way through this when they began to filter back first into the cabbage and then, as more came in, on to my crab. This time I killed two, and once more they departed to the far side of the field. At the risk of getting a sore throat I finished my half-smoked cigarette and lit another. This was on its last legs when once more the same pigeon came back. In spite of the fact that one of my birds was caught up in a grotesque position in the top of the tree, several came back to its branches and again I killed a single one, though this time I had two quick shots.

Five times this process was repeated with the flock never for a moment out of my sight. After the sixth bird had been shot they returned to the far crab, stayed there a few minutes, and then took off once more, apparently to come in again. This time, however, they came over high and in a few moments were lost to sight heading for a near-by patch of kale. That was the last I saw of them or indeed of any pigeon for the rest of the morning, and I finally picked up my gear, collected my birds and trudged home to a very belated breakfast wondering just what significance it all had.

The Little Things

by Weekender

As I walked down a ride in a friend's covert last month, I thought just how many things lots of people miss when they are out with a gun. Some go out for sport; some for the pot; some after vermin; but there are a few of us who are quite content to go out and return empty-handed yet satisfied, and considering that we have had a good time, provided we have seen a little wild life.

As I walked along that ride, a blackbird dodged away without its usual clattering call. It made me wonder if perhaps it had been born dumb or if it had simply not bothered to alert the rest of the wood! A rat went scurrying towards its home in the roots of a huge old oak, only to stop to sniff the air before it finally entered and disappeared into the gloom. In the distance a woodpecker rent the silence with its hollow laugh, that rose to a high-pitched scream, and was answered by the call of another some way off. A starling had a tug-o'-war with a stubborn worm that refused to leave its earthy home. A sparrow-hawk stood on its tail and "trod air" as it saw me.

All these things helped to make my day worthwhile. I returned to the house with only one pigeon, yet I was quite satisfied. Rather different to one man whom I shot with a couple of years ago. He admitted that he had little interest in nature, but simply enjoyed pitting his shooting skill against that of others. Such people should take up clay pigeon shooting, or else not shoot at all.

The .22 air rifle is a handy weapon against rats.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

ON many estates where artificial pheasant rearing is practised on a big scale the order is now: "All hands to the kennels." Beat men who normally visit the H.Q. at irregular times may have to turn up there every morning to cope with the sudden pressure of work which is inseparable from this operation; and any beat man who happens to be single may have to take up his abode in the bothy for a month or so until this pressure eases, although it must be said that most beat men are married. Nevertheless, I have in byegone years spent several pleasant interludes in the bothy at the kennels with other young keepers during this seasonal rush.

Each man has a routine job every morning which he tackles without orders from the head. One may feed the birds in the pens and collect the eggs; another may throw down corn and fill the water tins at the hatching boxes; while still another may see to the dogs and the ferrets. Then the head appears (if he has not been astir about an hour before the others leave their bothy!) and the business of attending to the fostermother hens begins. Inevitably some hens that are being tested for sitting have to be rejected, and others put in their boxes; which means some careful check work if the rejected birds have to be returned to their original owners. I have known of minor rows that began because a young keeper mixed up rejected hens, or failed to transcribe an owner's name correctly from the sitting box. One row that concerned myself arose because the headkeeper himself did not use his spectacles. I had written the name quite legibly in the recognised place, namely, on the front of the box immediately under the projecting roof; but the slight shadow combined with lack of optical assistance had made the head read something different. So he taxed me with writing a wrong name when I accepted the hen from the estate carter in the first place. No-one could have been more astounded than himself when I spelt out the name for him letter by letter.

Organised Vermin Forays

In addition to this routine work connected with pheasant rearing, there are always organised forays against vermin when keepers are concentrated. An outbreak of egg stealing by winged raiders results in a drive for magpies and jays, or a combing of the coverts for carrion crow nests. And if foxes are known to be too numerous, they get attention also. Rats do not lend themselves so easily to organised attack by shooters, particularly if they have become entrenched in the breeding pens, or around the sitting boxes; but ferreting and shooting with small-bore guns is often practicable. And a patient man with a powerful air rifle can account for a lot of rats where disturbance must be reduced to a minimum. In fact, the .22 air rifle of reputable make is a handy weapon at this time of the year and a little later for dealing with young rats, young rabbits, and the young of vermin birds after they have just left the nest. My own .22 air rifle will send a slug right through a rat at 20 yards.

Heyday of Game Preservation

In the heyday of game preservation my verbal sketch of these activities at the beginning of rearing time did not always apply on the very big estates, or only applied in part, because many of the beat men in those days reared on their own ground almost as if they were on separate estates. In one respect this system was fairer to the beat men concerned. They stood or fell by their own efforts, whereas in the other system of combined rearing each man was doled out his quota of birds whether he had been successful or otherwise. In very extreme cases a beat man who was not popular with the headkeeper might have got less than his quota, although he would probably never know definitely that he had been put to a disadvantage; for the keeper who goes to the rearing field first among, say, four rearers is not likely to know much about the later hatchings.

Apart from this personal aspect, rearing by beat men on their own ground saves a tremendous lot of work. The poults do not have to be carted for miles, nor have the coops, runs, feed huts and so forth to be brought back to the kennels later in the year. These appliances generally remain away from the H.Q., so that they may be ready for future occasions. On the other hand, an outlying beat man can have a difficult time, if he has to cope with a serious outbreak of disease, or an unusual quantity of vermin, alone. It is then that he would have been better off with his share of a combined rearing.

However, even at the height of the Victorian and Edwardian prosperity beat men who reared on their own were comparatively few. It was only on the big estates of perhaps 10,000 acres and over that this system was practised at a time when sporting squires and lairds vied with each other to produce and bag the biggest quantity of game; which meant prestige in those spacious days. And we gather from old chronicles, and from the not-so-old "Record Bags" of the late Sir Hugh Gladstone, that those powerful landowners succeeded very well in the sphere of game preservation. Their fame spread all over Britain. Shooting men and gamekeepers everywhere knew all about their colossal bags, their magnificent house parties, their personal skill with the gun, and their large retinues.

An Incorrect Idea

That some of those great establishments were regarded with awe by many people of modest means is no exaggeration. No doubt, these lowlier ones, including small-estate gamekeepers, believed that money was poured out like water there, and that all the keepers who produced the glittering show were supermen who had only to raise a finger to command working tackle of all kinds. Alas! this estimate was not always correct. I only started keepering when the cult of the huge bag was beginning to lose its attraction, but I gathered enough information from direct experience and talks with older men that keepers on very big estates were seldom better off in any way than their brethren on the smaller properties. Too often, in fact, they were merely cogs in a game-producing machine. The squires and lairds knew the undermen as semi-strangers who were here today but might be elsewhere the following season. This was the rule; but even the old stagers, who could hardly be described as semi-strangers, had always to keep their distance. All contact with the game department was made through the headkeeper, and he would have been rightly displeased if the shoot owner had shown any undue interest in an underman.

To return for a moment to the monetary side, I still remember how surprised I was when I discovered the smallness of an underkeeper's wage on an estate whose squire had an international reputation. It was just about rock bottom, and contrasted sharply with the landowner's luxurious style. I marvelled then that a nobleman who would have rigidly refused to shoot with factory-made guns, or turn out in public in a mass-produced car, because his prestige might have suffered, could nevertheless be quite happy to employ cheap gamekeepers.

It is possible, of course, that a person of this exalted rank did not bother much with financial matters, which are or were, after all, the business of the land agent or factor. But I did hear once of a forthright headkeeper who rectified this casual attitude when an underkeeper was on the point of being engaged. He told his master bluntly that he had no use for cheap gamekeepers or anything else that could be got cheaply. Rather surprisingly, his vigorous advice was accepted. So it would appear, in some cases at least, that those big-estate keepers were not paid in accordance with the general magnificence because they did not voice their grievance in the proper place.

That forthright headkeeper, being more in touch with the seamy side of life than his noble employer, knew that an underman who was never free from financial anxieties could not give of his best. That being so, one is apt to wonder whether some of those colossal bags of byegone times would have been even more staggering if the staffs of keepers responsible had been paid double their modest wages.

Marathon Flight

by Geoffrey Pollard

I DO not remember a worse September for grouse hawking than that of 1954. Come to think of it, I do not remember a worse season—meteorologically. However there were just two days so laced with incident as to compensate for what had been and what was yet to come. The heroine on both occasions was that young falcon The Bitch and it is of her second performance that I shall tell.

On the previous day we had visitors—Americans. Very special. Visitors who come to see our hawks fly always make us nervous. Invariably, everything that can go wrong does. And, of course, the moment they depart struggling with masks of disappointment, the hawks put on a terrific show . . .

In this particular instance we were unusually edgy. Our visitors had completed a fairly comprehensive tour of nearly all the practising falconers in England and Western Europe. We were the last on their list before they returned home. They could stay only two days, and it was not long after their arrival they made it clear that they had still to see something worthwhile. Fortunately, the elements which we had been cursing heartily saved us on the first day; it blew the usual gale with a thin, icy rain. We spent the time impressing upon our guests all the things that could go wrong. They, for their part, looked as though they had heard it before. Constantly.

The second morning was cold, but the gale had ceased and the rain stopped. The gyrfalcon let us down badly. She continued to be out of condition. I asked our visitors if they had ever seen high waiting-on. They assured me they had, so I asked them how high. As they seemed uncertain, I pointed to a buzzard soaring easily in a thermal. "As high as that?"

"No. I should think about half that." The buzzard was 500ft. up.

I put Theign, the intermewed peregrine tiercel on the wing. He is the finest flier in my experience, but has one cardinal fault—he lacks guts. The tiercel climbed four or five times higher than the buzzard and waited for us to serve him. I took good care to ensure we did not find grouse. After he had been waiting-on half-an-hour I remarked that it was no use. The grouse must still be sheltering in the valleys, and I tossed out the lure.

Very dramatically, Theign stooped right to my feet. The Americans waxed enthusiastic. That really was something. "What a shame you couldn't find a covey. We'd love to have seen him kill."

A Conference Is Held

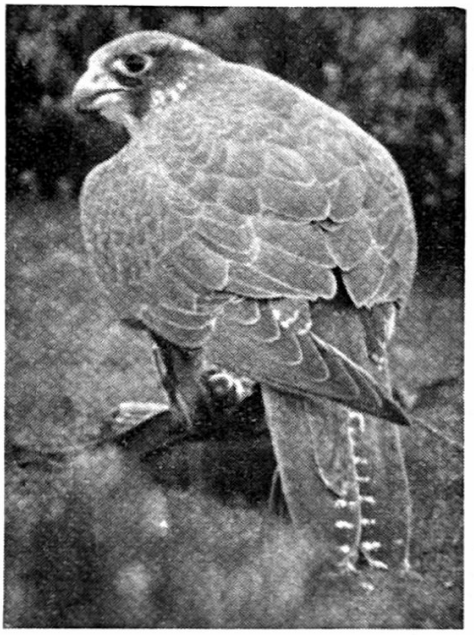
At lunch, the sun arrived and with it summer. Grouse would be easy to find. In the mews, out of earshot of our visitors, a conference was held. Which of the remaining falcons could we trust? Gibbun, the gyrtiercel, and Rebecca, a peregrine, had large gaps in their wings due to the moult. Rowena, another peregrine, would not be sharp set till tea-time. There remained The Bitch. Nine days had passed since she showed us what she could do. I took her on to my fist, hooded her and announced we would try for grouse at the other end of the moor. The Black Hill is a favourite place and usually lucky for me.

Halfway between the cottage and the Black Hill is a tin structure known as the lunch hut. It was the spot where the guns ate in the days when this moor was shot. Just as we turned by the lunch hut three grouse skimmed along and settled 70 yards in front. Under cover of the hut I unhooded the falcon and cast her off for what was to be an epic lasting over two hours.

The Bitch rose in tight rings, then came overhead. At no real pitch, but she was obviously not prepared to mount any higher. We formed a half-moon line and with the wind at our backs advanced on the grouse. I noticed, sinkingly, the amount of bracken. The three birds were sprung and flew directly for the Cardingmill Valley.

We shouted and The Bitch stooped, knocking one down in the bracken. Again it was flushed and again she struck, only the second time it fell amid the really dense bracken of the valley slope. This was becoming a rat hunt. Exciting for our uninitiated visitors. But not grouse hawking. The falcon, sulking, went off in the direction of Belmore: a favourite aerial playground abounding in thermals. Cigarettes in the heather cooled us off.

There was a pool at Belmore which



Gyrfalcon on the lure. Note the loose jesses.

frequently attracted mallard. If The Bitch were there it would be worth a try. We reached the lunch hut, but before we could get in the car there was a sudden clash of bells and there, waiting-on above us, sulks forgotten, was the little falcon. Belmore was abandoned and, forming a straight line, we beat back to the cottage. The Bitch followed for a while then raked away. We sat down and waited.

Presently she reappeared at an enormous pitch. Although we strained our eyes, only two of us could make her out. If we could flush a covey now! But the sun was really hot and grouse obviously had sought the valley shade.

A passing stock dove brought The Bitch roaring down. It escaped in a plantation three miles away. We seemed to be smoking an awful lot of cigarettes. Eventually, a dot materialized high above the trees and drifted in the currents towards us. I heard the faintest tinkle of Indian bells. We pressed on downwind.

The Arrow-Straight Stoop

Over the uneven ground, our line became more and more straggling. Being on the flank, I soon lost sight of everyone else. Twice the falcon's stoop traversed the sky; twice she returned disappointed. The cottage came in view. I guessed the others must have arrived there ahead of me. It was nothing short of tragedy she should be unrewarded after so much endeavour.

I turned to see where she was and gasped. Directly over my head, faithfully, and fantastically high. Like a mad creature, I rushed over the heather, desperate to find quarry with which to serve her. The spaniel, her tongue lolling out, waddled to Medlicott pool, the far side of the rise.

The next thing I knew was that The Bitch was stooping; not the curling, twisting stoop that denotes a passing pigeon, but the supreme arrow-straight affair at game. The stoop that spellbounds. My gaze swept to two pairs of mallards' wings vanishing below the skyline. I knew, on recognising them, she would kill. Duck take cover in water alone and of water there was none in that direction. I could not see the outcome but clearly on the breeze drifted the crack of impact. There was no throw-up.

It would take time to find her in the thick bracken. I decided to go back to the cottage, tell them what had happened, leave the spaniel in the kennel, then return to look for her. I did not hurry. I was sorry no one had shared that stoop.

In Hot Pursuit

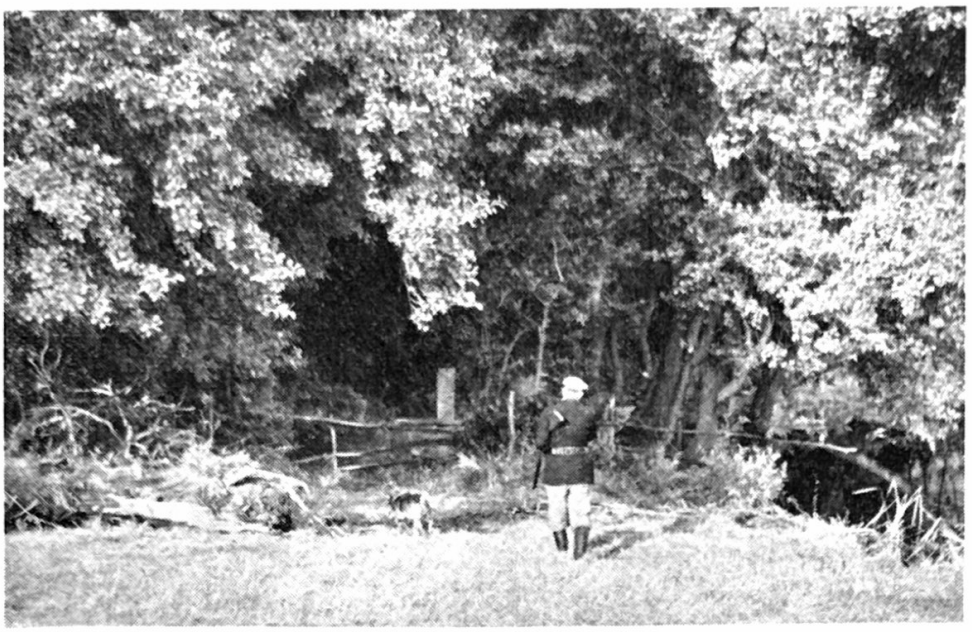
When I reached the gate, I saw the rest of the hawking party standing about in small groups. They were silent; unheedful of my approach, their eyes straining over Barrister's Plain to the distant outline of the Clees. They seemed to be having difficulty with their breathing. I started to say something, but was immediately interrupted. In between "My heavens!" and "What a hawk!" and certain assorted oaths I gathered something had happened. Their incoherence did not help but finally I got the story.

The Bitch, having struck down one of the mallard, had either lost it in the waist-high bracken or was determined to kill both. At all events, she was seen to reappear from behind the cottage in hot pursuit of the surviving duck. Our guests had a grandstand view as she flew it high in the heavens right over the flat country and out by the Clees; back again following the line of Ashes Hollow to the lunch hut, swinging south to the cottage and passing overhead close enough for it to be seen how near they were to exhaustion with their beaks wide, and always the falcon no more than a yard behind, unable to close the gap. But refusing to give up.

At last, after 15 minutes of nail-bitiing suspense, The Bitch made her final effort. Somehow, despite two hours of hard flying, she found the strength to throw herself above the mallard and positioned for the decisive stoop. But, as luck would have it, the contestants were now near the pond at the edge of Barristers' Plain. Even as The Bitch started to fall, the duck plunged into the water sending up great plumes of wetness to soak the falcon. It was immediately following this I had come on the scene.

We wandered along to the pool. The falcon was sitting on the far bank, wet and panting so hard that I thought she would burst. The mallard, petrified, could just be seen neatly concealed in a cluster of reeds. I rewarded The Bitch with a full crop of woodpigeon—her favourite food.

When tea was over, I went with the dogs down the slopes at the rear of the cottage and found the first mallard—the drake. Its neck had been sliced through at the base by the hind talons. Only a fragment of skin and congealed blood still held it to the body.



Away to the woods on a springtime dawn patrol.

The Young Shot

Bright and Early

by Petrel

THIS journal's leader of April 8 brought back memories. Memories of youthful air rifle days and the first rabbit killed after a long, early morning stalk amongst the thick, coarse grasses of a damp Cornish meadow. Behind a tussock the unsuspecting coney crouched, seemingly secure in its frozen immobility, with only head and ears protruding. A cat-like, plimsolled approach through the dew soaked grass brought the air gun within range, and the now or never realisation that the single, tiny pellet must fly true, sped the waisted slug directly on its mission to pierce the right eye of the quarry. Round and round in ever decreasing circles, like that mythical bird, sped the stricken rabbit, with the youthful Nimrod in hot pursuit, until crouching amongst the scant cover of a clump of couch it was secured by a small, firm hand across its loins and given a final, stunning chop across its outstretched neck. A moment of triumph indeed, but a triumph nullified as soon as paunching was complete and the spotted, flukey liver was brought to light. With this disclosure, half the victory was gone, and the dogs alone were guests at what should have been a conqueror's banquet.

Memories were reawakened, too, of the first rat to fall to the little gun. A summer evening found me leaning upon the bottom half of a stable door patiently watching the shadowy gloom beneath the manger. Presently a faint scuffle in the corner alerted sense and sight, and soon a rat appeared as if by magic to sit up and sniff the air midway across the stall. Slowly the gun came up until eye and foresight were aligned neatly through the backsight V just behind his ear, and at the *phutt* he jumped and toppled over. Another shot followed the first, and to make sure I went in search of a brick, scared of handling a rat that might not be dead. Returning I found the rat had somehow moved nearer the wall and from a safe distance I fired two more slugs into it before administering the *coup de grace.*

The Early Round

There were other memories also, of muggy, summer nights with a .410, of perspiring, midge-bitten rabbit stalks through thistles, briars and cow pats to gain that extra, vital ten yards, of starlings flighted as they topped the garden wall before dropping in to roost amongst the drive-side rhododendrons, of soaking grain in alcohol and picking up drunken sparrows by the bucketful beside the cornfields, of slates blown off the barn roof by the .410 when a rat, in the light of a torch, ran the gauntlet along a beam ; of miracle flying shots from the hip at blackbirds caught raiding the kitchen garden.

But, besides all this, there was brought home the realisation that since those holidays I have become a sluggard for staying in bed of a morning, and although I secretly realised it all the time, it took that leading article to remind me what I was missing. And when one comes down to it, one is missing quite a lot by lying abed on these bright and balmy spring mornings, for apart from everything aesthetic, between sun-up and the arrival of the milkman is the time when the vermin patrol should be at its most active.

Losses Through Laziness

Those of us with any experience of a trap round know that the early hours are vital ones. Not only is it the duty of the trapper to visit his sets as soon as possible to destroy any still living victims, but it is also a wise and necessary move if he is to save his catch from the attacks of predators. The man who neglects or neglected, rather) his rabbit wires until late in the morning, for instance, had only his laziness to blame for the living he lost to marauding foxes and cats.

And while one can put up with the loss of a rabbit or two, there may be more serious consequences, such as the recent experience of a neighbour, who was catching up a few of his pheasants for the laying pens. Oversleeping, he went at mid-morning to inspect his cages which were of the push-under-the-wire-and-it-drops-behind-the-bird variety, and found one on its side with the entrance netting forced upwards into a hoop shape and the ground beneath littered with hen pheasant's feathers. Obviously the work of a fox. Here, however, he was able to turn a loss into a profit, for resetting the catcher, he baited it with a dead hen and arranged three gin traps just inside the entrance. Two mornings later he had the fox held fast in two of them, and he was up bright and early on that day and has been ever since.

It took a fox to get me early astir last week. At ten to seven from the bedroom window I saw Reynard sloping casually up the path towards the hen run not sixty yards away, and then on finding admission barred, trot back down the track and through the hedge. Since then earlier vigils have gone unrewarded, but sooner or later he will share the fate of spies and renegades.

Surprising Squirrels

For some time now I have been plotting the downfall of a family of grey squirrels, which have their home in the hollow heights of a lofty elm beyond the reach of pole or ladder. The only time to catch them is before the world is awake while the grounds are deserted, when a cautious stalk through the rhododendrons will surprise them at the foot of a horse chestnut tree whose branches span the drive to shake hands with the lower boughs of the elm. Once there were five squirrels ; now there is one. The fourth fell to a borrowed .410 and an age-old trick yesterday morning. Spotting my approach the tree rat shinned up the chestnut and clapped tight to its thickest limb, where he played hide and seek with every move I made. Dropping my hat on the drive I sneaked round behind him and he was still watching the hat when I fired.

Squirrels are fortunately not so plentiful hereabouts as they used to be in the days when the head gardener was at his wits' end to stem the raids on his peach trees. He had a certain amount of success with traps set along the top of the garden wall which the squirrels used as a runway, until it was pointed out to him that these constituted pole traps and as such were illegal. On the nearby farm squirrels have been foraging far afield, for several have been killed in the granary which is a good three hundred yards from the nearest tree. And while I think of it, do squirrels drink ? I cannot remember having seen one do so, though they must obtain a certain amount of liquid refreshment from fruit and even cucumbers, as we discovered to our cost last year when squirrels were caught red-handed feeding among the strawberry and cucumber beds. Rats on the other hand are notoriously thirsty creatures. My neighbour has just neatly outwitted a couple of rats which had been stealing from the pig trough. He filled the trough with water and covered it with two boards, leaving just enough space between them for the rats to jump into the trough and drown.

The weapon for these early morning forays round the grounds and curtilage is a .410 which is plenty large enough for dealing with furred and feathered vermin in confined spaces, and not loud enough to wake every lazier member of the household. A 12-bore fired at a pea picking jay will broach an ugly gap in the trim row of Early Wonders.

The chief difficulty about these dawn patrols, until one gets used to the new routine, is that of waking up in time without recourse to mechanical aids such as the telephone, which is expensive, or the alarm clock which is either unreliable, inaudible to the heavy sleeper, or universally shattering in effect. The answer, I find, is to have a keen dog that wants to be up and doing at first light and scratches frantically at the bedroom door. If that door has been recently repainted, its amateur decorator is sure to be up betimes.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

DISTRESS CALL FOR WILDFOWLERS

Sir,—The Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Wildfowlers' Association contemplate having a distress call for its members. All coastal areas and particularly the Wash area can be very hazardous for wildfowling at times. Lost in thick fog, or being trapped by the flood tide, are two great dangers.

Some time ago a wildfowler in this area broke his leg on the marsh and by sheer luck his cries were heard by two other fowlers. They did manage (but with great difficulty) to carry him off the marsh before a flood tide. If his cries for help had not been heard, he would have been drowned by the incoming tide.

We have had various suggestions to the method for making such a distress call—by whistle (blowing duck decoy whistle), blowing down barrel of gun, and shooting cartridges. We want a simple and effective method. We would welcome suggestions from readers of *The Shooting Times*. We have written to W.A.G.B.I. suggesting that we should have a national distress call for The Wildfowlers' Association.

F. W. MALT,
Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

ENTER THE PEREGRINE

Sir,—I fancy that "Peregrine" cannot have studied the literature of hawking extensively, or he must have read about fine trained peregrines losing an eye when killing a kestrel. The old Badminton volume (on coursing and falconry) gives one instance, and there are others.

My trained falcon caught both kestrels and merlins by rising high in air above them while the small hawks kept on in level flight. At each stoop of the big hawk, the small one evaded the larger by a narrow margin, and screamed at each narrow escape. The actual clutch which terminated such chases was never fatal to the kestrel or merlin. The big hawk alit with its fighting captive, and simply pulled its head off at the first opportunity.

There are eighteen eyries of the peregrine in Kintyre, where I spent most of my life, and I am quite sure that every Kintyre peregrine kills grouse on sight. They find them in the air for grouse must fly to feed and "court" like other birds.

DUGALD MACINTYRE,
Oban.

[We note, in an excellent article, "Hawks on a Shoot," in the issue for April 7 of our contemporary, *The Field*, that the well-known sportsman and ornithologist, Mr. Esmond Lynn-Allen, says this of the peregrine: "But, alas, it would tax the powers of an eminent Queen's Counsel to make any adequate defence of this magnificent killer. The bird is bloodthirsty—it kills for pleasure as well as for food—and its boldness is shown by the fact that it is on record as having been seen to attack almost all the largest birds on the British list. Moreover, the peregrine loves game—particularly grouse."—Ed.]

Sir, — "Peregrine," in his letter under the above heading (issue April 8) writes: "It is a most unusual thing for a peregrine to strike or bind to anything on the ground. I think it would be fair to say that in the wild state this does not happen."

About four years ago I was up at the head of Kentmere dale in Westmorland watching peregrines. I chatted with the man who works the slate quarries, and he told me that a few days previously he had watched one of the peregrines stooping at a pigeon passing through the trough between the high fells. The pigeon repeatedly dodged the peregrine, until it became exhausted and settled on the fellside. The peregrine then bound to it on the ground.

The quarryman who is a man of normally dour, silent disposition, was obviously excited about a most unusual occurrence. He remarked that it was the first time he had ever known a peregrine to kill on the ground, and he has seen peregrines stoop to kill many times.

ROBERT D. HUMBER,
Kentrigg, Westmorland.

THE FOOD OF THE FOX

Sir,—"Tower-Bird" is quite right, and I imagine that few practical outdoor men will question the statement that, in normal circumstances, rabbit is a staple food of the fox.

On the strength of many years' examination of food remains found in and around earths, analyses of excrement, etc., taking the year as a whole I would assess the proportion of rabbit to the total diet as at least 40 per cent, and during the breeding season I believe that it touches 60 per cent.

One cannot, of course, hope to give exact figures in such a case, but I do not think those mentioned are very far out, at least in the south-west.

F.H.L.,
Crapstone, Devon.

LOAD FOR A 4-BORE

Sir,—While I cannot claim to any experience in the use of a 4-bore gun, I would state most emphatically that the load mentioned by Mr. Swaine (of 9 drams black powder to 3¼oz. shot) would be a terrific one for any gun of not more than 8¼lb. weight.

If we take the time-honoured formula (for m.l. guns) of 1oz. shot to every 6lb. of gun-weight, and powder in proportion, we get for an 8¼lb. gun a load of 3 ½ to 4 drams (say) and 1½oz. of shot.

J. C. M. NICHOLS,
Beacon Hill, Hindhead.

Sir—From the brief details Mr. Swaine gave of his heavy muzzle-loader, it would appear unlikely that it is, in fact, a 4-bore. The muzzle diameter of a cylinder 4-bore is 1.052in. This could easily be measured.

A reasonable load for a large-bore muzzle-loader of 8¼lb. weight would be 1¼oz. No. 4 shot driven by 4½ or 5 drams Curtis and Harvey No. 6-grain powder. The fact that the gun did not burst with the charge quoted is a reasonable assurance that it is, in fact, in a sound condition.

In all large-bore muzzle-loaders it is important to use a good main wad of thickness not less than ½-bore diameter, with a hard card wad ¼in. thick between main wad and powder. These wads should be rammed down hard. A thin card over the shot need not be thicker than the minimum necessary to retain the shot in the barrel.

I would be pleased to hear what progress Mr. Swaine is able to make with his old gun.

GEOFFREY HOYES,
(Chairman, The Muzzle Loaders' Association of Great Britain), 151 Camborne Road, Morden, Surrey.

APATHETIC FARMERS

Sir, — In your issue for March 11 Jack Collins writes of the apathetic farmer. This is also hinted at on page 155 sub-para, "A Successful Offensive."

I have been told by a farmer that, although pigeon eat the crops their droppings make wonderful manure. Is it to be taken, then, that the enclosed cutting, *Evening Standard* for March 22, is a forerunner to another request upon the State for losses incurred?

P. HARRIS,
Surrey.

[The cutting reads: "Wood-pigeon are ruining Kent broccoli crops, say the farmers."—Ed.]

Mr. F. B. Taylor presenting prizes at the Gamekeepers' Annual Clay Pigeon Competition, organised by Gallyon & Sons Ltd., at their shooting grounds at Madingley, Cambridge. (See full report of the meeting on page 248.)

MYXOMATOSIS

Sir,—Regarding the vexed controversy over myxomatosis, may I voice an opinion? First, far too many people are taking it for granted that myxomatosis will be here only for a few years, and then die out. These beliefs are based on what one hears has happened in Australia. Now let us get this clear: in Australia, myxomatosis is carried by the mosquito and not by the rabbit-flea as here in Europe and the U.K. When myxomatosis was introduced into Australia, the years following were not at all entirely suitable for the quick spreading of the virus, owing to unclimatic conditions for the mosquito. Consequently, rabbits were affected only in certain parts of the country, and many were the places where the virus missed. The rabbits that missed the virus carried on breeding at their usual rate, and people were led to believe that the rabbits were getting immune to the virus. They have now based their beliefs on our own coney. May I repeat that myxomatosis is spread in this country mainly by the rabbit-flea.

Now the rabbit-flea has been living for a long time, and it is not going suddenly to become another "dodo." Far from it. It will carry on breeding and feeding in the rabbits' fur until one day its offspring will eventually take up their abode on our last native rabbit; which, in my opinion, at the present rate of progress, will be in about five to seven years.

Myxomatosis is here to stay whether we like it or not, and we cannot stop it from spreading unless a complete annihilation by man of every rabbit in the country is made, which, incidentally, is entirely unpracticable. Myxomatosis will slowly and eventually kill all our rabbits. Nowhere to-day in this country are rabbits becoming immune. Perhaps we may be having some pockets in certain areas, and we hear reports that rabbits are thriving again. Whether man helps it or not, the rabbit-flea will continue to feed on the blood of our rabbits and so carry on the work of transplanting the virus.

It may interest many to know that the fleas of an infected rabbit will stay on the carcase for five to six days after the death of the rabbit. And any living creature or human who passes close enough for the fleas to feel the warmth of the body will cause them to vacate the carcase and so be carried on until they meet another victim.

R.C.,
Middx.

[While not agreeing with some of the statements made by our correspondent who, incidentally, was once a trapper in N. Canada, we are glad to publish his letter.—Ed.]

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Sir,—It will be much appreciated if you would publish in your Letters to the Editor column my change of address as below. I have now left West Street, Boston.

JOHN R. MARSHALL,
Secretary, South Lincolnshire Wildfowlers' Club, 2 Mill Hill, Wide Bargate, Boston, Lincs.

MOVABLE PIGEON HIDE

Sir,—During the period of snow, I found it impossible to get within range of pigeon feeding on kale or cabbage, so armed with a large white dust-sheet, four stout bean rods, a packet of drawing pins, and a white cap (plus gun and a pocketful of cartridges), I set up a hide. Before I had time to load, three birds came in and settled and started to feed on the top of some brussels sprouts, offering an easy shot. Two of these fell, but the third towered to a considerable height, to fall with a crash in the snow—only to get up again and fly away as if it had not been hit. Then it crashed into the snow for a second time, but for good and at the expense of another cartridge.

Unfortunately, I cannot obtain cheap cartridges for the destruction of these birds, as I cannot produce bills of sale or other written evidence as demanded by the County Pests Officer, so now I am saving their legs

as I would squirrel tails. I think they should be adequate proof.

Rabbits in this area are now no more, and squirrels are few and far between. So if any reader contacts me, he may have his pick of four healthy ferrets.

A. KEMP,
Watton-on-the-Hill, Surrey
(Ladworth 2574).

THE HONEY-BADGER

Sir,—Your joke about the habits of "man-eating" badgers in England are, I think, quite eclipsed by the true habits of the African ratel, or honey-badger. Proportionate to its size, this is the most courageous, ferocious and dangerous animal on the face of the earth. It is about the size of an English badger and very handsomely coloured or "tricked out" in brindled grey on the back and upper parts, and jet black below the centre line of its body.

It has a very tough and loose skin, quite impervious to stings and bites, and under that skin it has as many lives as forty cats. It has "a dark and a roving eye" (rather like a pug-dog's) and it goes about chuckling to itself at some private joke. This chuckling is especially pronounced when the ratel is being guided to a bees' nest by the "honey guide"—a bird rather like a wagtail but with the most extraordinary habits of any bird in creation (it has parasitic breeding habits like our cuckoo for one thing). In fact, the ratel and the "honey guide" are "quite a pair," though the bird will work also in conjunction with man.

Whether or not the English badger will attack man, the ratel is quite capable of attacking anything that walks. It does not go out of its way to attack larger animals, but if anything gets *in* its way (or interferes with it) it just goes into combat like an infuriated grizzly bear. It has interlocking jaws like our own badger, takes hold like a bulldog and, so far I know, does not let go until either it or its adversary (or both) are dead.

The ratel is especially dreaded among all animals from its alleged habit of aiming its attack at a most vulnerable part. Yet in my opinion this "hitting below the belt" is not due to cowardice. On the contrary, the ratel so often chooses to "mix it" with animals (including man) of at least ten times its own weight and size that it cannot, with the best will in the world, reach other vital parts even when standing on its hind legs like a bear.

Fortunately for man, the ratel rarely forages by day save in search of honey when it is fairly easy to circumvent if you happen to meet it on a footpath, or a game path. If it is coming towards you, step off the path and give it "the right of way." If it is "chuckling along" slowly in front of you, do not try to overtake it, or scare it off the path (it refuses to be scared!), but make a detour into the bush and rejoin the path well *ahead* of the ratel.

Never shoot a ratel if you can possibly avoid it. It is most unlucky, and it will almost certainly "sham dead" and spring at you when you approach!

Paradoxically enough, this formidable monster makes a delightful pet if captured young enough. In captivity the "honey badger" is docile, companionable, most intelligent, and very playful.

E. MUSPRATT,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

ORGANISED PIGEON SHOOTS

Sir,—As an organiser appointed by the Norfolk A.E.C., I feel that I ought to have some say in the organisation of pigeon shoots. In fact, as secretary of The Wells and District Wildfowlers' Club, I retail cartridges which I buy from the A.E.C. through the Pests Officer, and the organisation of shoots is taken out of my hands by the Lord of the Manor over whose land we shoot. This is only to be expected, as it would not be right for me to presume to give orders to his keepers. As I said before, in a previous letter, I think guns should report each Saturday to a keeper somewhere on his beat at a definite time. He can then divide them up among his coverts.

In Norfolk we have shot every Saturday afternoon from February 5 to April 2 (except once when there was a blizzard) in the coverts. The results have not been good, no one to my knowledge shooting more than a dozen birds per day, and many guns getting only two or three. And I believe that this is not due to lack of pigeon, but to lack of them being stirred up in every covert. Last Saturday I stood in a small wood for one and a half hours and had one shot. I then moved to another wood a quarter of a mile away where about 150 pigeon flew out on my arrival, and very few came back.

With regard to Mr. Harrison's letter (issue March 25), I do not know why the shoots have been restricted to four Saturdays only in Kent, and what reason can there be for not shooting until the end of March in all counties? To me it seems immaterial whether we shoot migrant or home-bred pigeon. The pigeon here at any time are eating the farmers' crops whether it is clover, kale, or newly-sown grain, and the more resident pigeon shot the better. I do not favour delaying organised shoots until March. His statement that it is easier to cover the potential feeding grounds rather than the roosting woods may apply in Kent where there are many large woods and the fields are comparatively small, but it does not apply to north Norfolk. Here, the fields are large and the woods are more scattered. One gun hiding by a field of clover may well see pigeon settling 150 yards away in the same field.

However, in any county, there are very few farmers who can spare the time to sit in a hide and shoot over decoys for three hours on a spring morning. The lone shooter who can afford the time cannot always afford enough cartridges, even at half price, and he is at a disadvantage because he cannot cover all the feeding grounds at once. Therefore, I believe decoying pigeon during the winter to be impracticable. In the summer it is the other way about with the accent on decoying and covert shooting not possible. But can anyone tell me how to scare flies at the same time?

R. G. TICEHURST,
Wells, Norfolk.

GAME SHOOTING IN EIRE

Sir,—The Minister of Justice has just issued the shooting dates for game in Eire for the season—partridges from October 15 to November 14, and pheasants (cocks only) from October 15 to January 31.

The old dates for partridges used to be from September 20, and this was satisfactory to all. Then we had some years of close season for partridges with the result that birds were not properly broken up. Last season partridge shooting started on October 1, and even with this late date it was possible to break up some of the coveys, so that birds could be distributed over the ground. Now it looks as if there will be little chance of this.

Again, we have had a close season for hen pheasants for some years, with the result that there are far too many hens for cocks; so that a great many hens will not be mated.

If these dates are to continue it is not going to improve the stock of birds in either breeds in this country. One cannot help wondering who is responsible for giving the Minister such advice as to dates.

A. H. VERSCHOYLE,
Athy, Co. Kildare.

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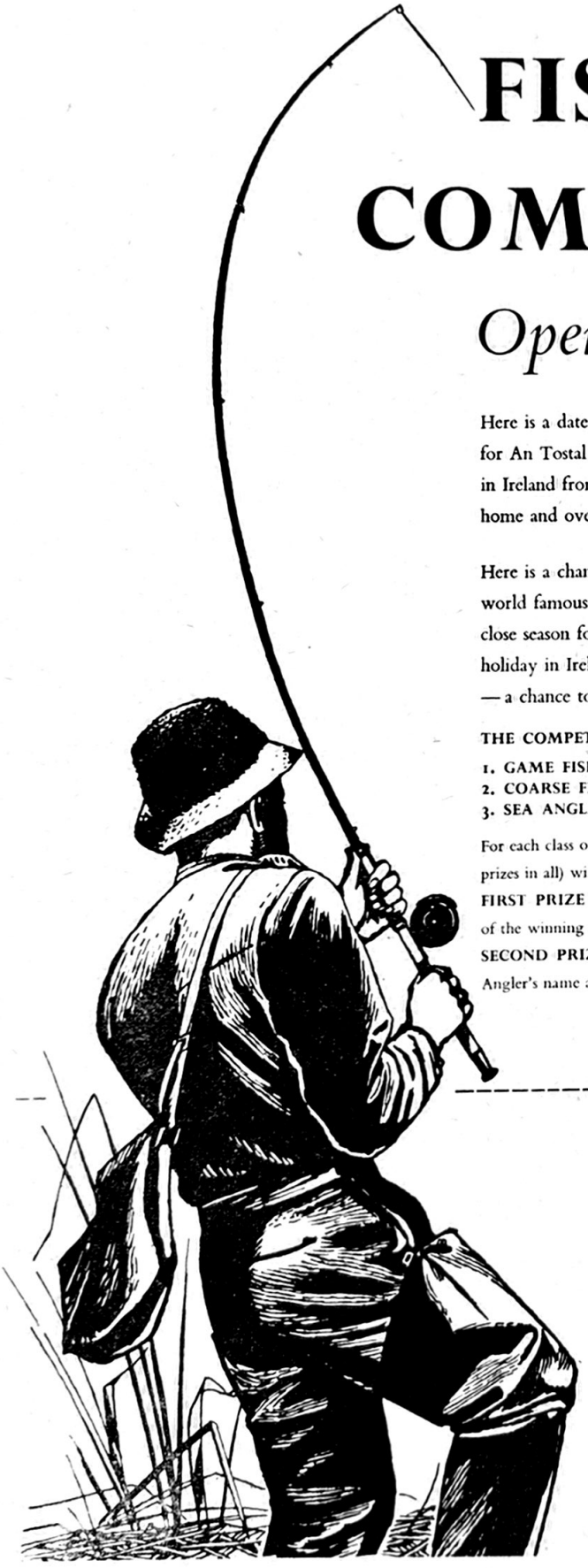

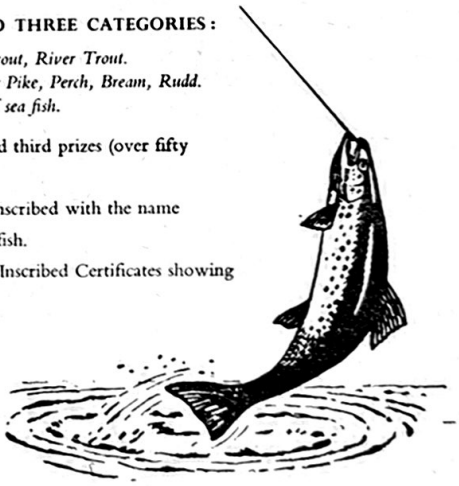

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

THE recent spell of fine weather (I am writing this on Easter Sunday) has enabled training to forge ahead and many of us who have been moaning about the delays caused by the shocking late winter are now catching up on our training programmes. Very few people realise how the weather affects gundog training, but as I have many times stated, the number of days per year which are really suitable for *early* work on dogs is not a large one.

Of course, once a dog is finished hand-training and is getting experience in the field the weather is not so frightfully important, within reason, but it is quite impossible to make

Delivery, by the fully-trained pupil, of a winged cock pheasant.

a success of dropping and retrieving lessons in pouring rain, or on very wet ground, or during high winds, snow or, for that matter, extreme heat. However, even in a training kennels it is amazing how many dogs one can get through in the course of a fine, suitable day, and if you are a believer, as I am, of "little and often" as regards training, then on these good days it is possible to get all the younger pupils out twice or even three times for short spells of work.

Crop of Training Queries

This season of the year always brings me a heavy post of queries from readers who are training their own dogs, and several have recently been worried about the question of delivery of the dummy. I suppose that it is the influence of training classes and field trials, but nowadays novice and amateur trainers seem much more concerned about the finer points of gundog work, which is a very good thing. Whereas a few years ago the average owner would be as pleased as Punch providing his dog retrieved the dummy instead of running off and playing with it, today he demands a much greater degree of perfection, and wants to see a fast and stylish retrieve with a quick return and a "polished" delivery. I am very pleased about this, for not only does it give me more to write about but it shows that the subject is being taken seriously and underlines the obvious increase in popularity of gundog training as a sport in itself.

My old friend, "the average shooting man," ought to be as delighted about this as I am, and I hope he is. The more people we can get interested in shooting, dogs, field trials and the rest, the better for all concerned. I hold no brief for the few selfish people who seem to resent newcomers to the sport, nor for those who moan and groan because it means that difficulties in securing nominations at trials are increased. We must set to and do something about it, and in particular about getting more shooting men and estate owners and syndicates interested in trials and, consequently, allowing their ground to be used for them. Societies will have to try to hold more trials, or perhaps even the Kennel Club will devise some scheme whereby some sort of qualification will be necessary before a dog can be entered in an open stake.

Facing Up To It

We must face it—at the present time quite a lot of dogs are entered for important open stakes when they are obviously not up to them—they have not the slightest chance of winning or even getting a certificate, and by entering such dogs the owner is doing the owner of a promising dog out of a nomination. It is all very well to think on the lines "yer pays yer money and yer takes yer choice," and that anyone is entitled to a nomination if he pays his entry fees and is lucky in the draw. This would apply if there were plenty of trials and lots of suitable grounds upon which to hold them, but as things exist at present I believe that it would be far better for all concerned for societies to try to run more puppy and non-winner stakes for the less advanced dogs (to put it kindly), and for owners of such to gain their experience (and thrills) by entering these instead of cluttering up the big open stakes and thereby possibly giving a sub-standard dog the chance of winning.

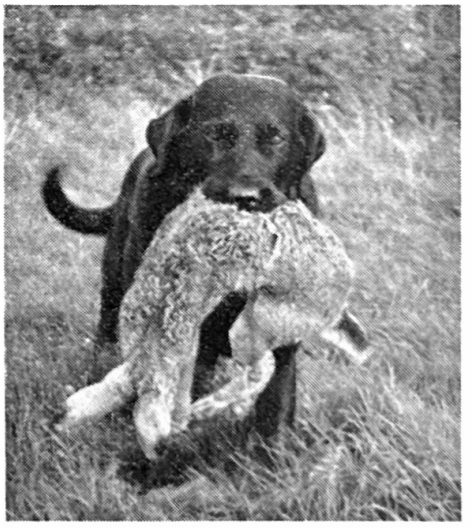
Have interested readers ever thought how easily a fairly good dog might win an open stake where the majority of the competitors are indifferent performers, whereas in a really hot stake every dog has to work every inch of the way to gain even a certificate? I know all this boils down to luck, fairness and sportsmanship and all the rest, and I am the last person to wish to see the element of luck removed from trials (heaven knows, I have been lucky enough myself at times!). But we must draw a line somewhere, and it seems to me a waste of the owner's money and a good many people's time when a sub-standard dog is entered for a big open stake.

There is another aspect of this situation which is also worthy of serious consideration. Imagine the enterprising secretary of a trial society having found a "new" ground, and after a lot of hard work, tact and diplomacy persuaded the shooting tenants to hold a trial on it. These shooting tenants possibly know nothing of trials and trial dogs, and imagine that they must be really first-rate animals and bound to put up a good show. Imagine their disappointment and, possibly, extreme annoyance when they discover that a good many of the competitors are no better (and in many cases not nearly such good gamefinders) as the dogs they take out on a shooting day. If many birds are left or lost, the hosts are likely to take a very dim view of the proceedings, and quite possibly will not allow another trial on their shoot—and so another ground is lost to field trials.

I am, of course, referring to open stakes. In the case of puppy and non-winners' stakes, the secretaries do (or should) make it quite clear to the donors of the ground what to expect. Incidentally, things are such these days that many of these puppy and non-winners' stakes are as of high a standard (and sometimes better) than some of the open stakes. I judged a non-winners' stake this last season whereat the standard would not have disgraced any open stake. Later in the season I judged an open stake where at least half of the competing dogs were not fit to run in any stake, let alone an open one.

There are, of course, very many open stakes where the standard is frighteningly high, but this all depends upon the draw, and with more and more enthusiastic novices coming along, all itching to win two open stakes and make their dogs field trial champions (or perhaps only wanting to give them experience?) things are going to be very difficult indeed in the coming season. I am all for encouraging the beginner, and I believe I have done as much as anybody to foster an interest in trials, training classes and gundog training generally. But I believe that owners are doing the whole game a grave dis-service by entering for open stakes dogs which they must realise, are just not up to the standard. In the same way, some societies are to blame for not trying to get more non-winners' stakes going.

I believe that before very long there will be some alteration of field trial regulations, making it necessary for a dog to qualify in a non-winners' stake before being eligible for an open stake. However, I fully realise the difficulties which such alterations entail, and in the meantime I appeal to owners' sense of sportsmanship



Delivery with ease of a heavy hare.

to refrain from entering their dogs for stakes which are likely to be out of their class, and to societies to try to get in more "minor" stakes whenever ground can be found for them.

A Matter of Delivery

Having allowed my typewriter to run away with me once again, let us get back to the topic I intended to discuss when I started this article—delivery of the dummy. We all like to see a good clean delivery, and a stylish one with the dog sitting and holding its head up is perhaps the perfection at which many people aim. However, whereas some dogs seem to have a naturally good delivery from the start of training,

many more require some special work if it is to be attained, and many more require a serious reduction in the amount of dummy work they are given. This may sound paradoxical, but I am quite sure it is true. I am for ever harping on this particular theme—that most novice trainers give their dogs far too much boring and useless dummy retrieving, and this in itself can bring about a poor delivery or prevent one from being arrived at naturally. Hard mouth, as I have written in the past, may be partly induced by the overdoing of dummy work, and novice trainers will be helping themselves and their dogs no end by giving these points serious consideration.

Many cases of poor delivery arise from accidental causes during puppyhood — very often during early puppyhood. A youngster, living indoors, gets hold of an expensive glove or a silk stocking or something of that sort, and starts playing with it. The irate gets into a flap and immediately starts chasing the puppy or perhaps dragging the article away from it. I know one cannot very easily explain to a pannicky wife or daughter that the puppy should be induced to bring the "retrieve" along and deliver it up naturally but this is in actual fact what should be done if you are to work "according to the book." I think that this is one of these points which emphasise that where a puppy is liable to get into mischief in the house (and what puppy is not?) and especially where there is a family concerned, the pupil would probably be far better off (from every point of view) if it were housed in a kennel, at any rate until its training was completed.

A dog living indoors may very easily get hold of a slipper or something and actually wish to deliver it (bearing in mind the training which it is receiving) but master or mistress is busy reading the paper, or perhaps not in the room at all at that time, and the puppy wanders round with the object in its mouth. Ultimately, not knowing what to do with it, it starts playing with it or chewing it. All very understandable and, believe me, very, very common. A few experiences like this and the foundation of a poor delivery is laid. I have not the space this week to go more thoroughly into this question, but I hope I have said enough to give food for thought on just one angle of gundog training which might be thought to be very minor but which is, in actual fact, quite important.

Problems of a Trainer

The gundog trainer comes up against all sorts of problems, some interesting, some irritating, and nearly all of them requiring a great deal more thought than one might suppose. The trainer's life may look very exciting and comparatively easy from the outside, but like most jobs of work it has it disadvantages, many of which can be very real ones. For instance, one of the most trying problems in any kennel which takes in other people's dogs is that of the escapologist. Some dogs just cannot stand confinement, and unless housed in a dog-proof kennel they will be a constant source of worry. I have four such dogs here now—two labradors and a setter—all bitches, and a German shorthaired pointer dog. Although they are perfectly happy and quite accustomed to me (one of the labradors is my own, and all have been here many months), they will get out of any kennel which has any weakness they can take advantage of.

The German dog is probably the worst, for he climbs like a cat and has managed to escape from three of the four runs which I had previously considered quite dog-proof. Although the runs are wired over the top with heavy gauge netting, the dog has found out how to deal with them. He climbs up the vertical wire, hangs on by hooking his paws in it, and works away at the top wire with his teeth until he manages to break a strand. He then pushes his head through and continues to enlarge the hole until he can get his whole body through.

A wooden building means nothing to this dog if he decides he would rather be on the outside than the inside. He has ripped two quite strong wooden kennels apart since he has been with me, first finding a small weak spot where he can get a grip with his teeth and thereafter enlarging the hole — even through thick weatherboarding — and once not being merely content with making a big enough gap to get through, but tearing down several other boards as well, presumably for the sheer joy of it! The strange thing is that once he is out of his kennel, this dog just stays about waiting for something to happen or somebody to turn up—all he wants to do is to be with somebody, it seems.

For the last couple of weeks I have been converting a large wooden building, formerly used as a garage and storehouse, into "inside" kennels. Not only do I need more kennels, but I want to be sure that next winter I can get all the dogs under one roof during bad weather (as much for my own convenience as for their comfort) and I also want to be reasonably certain that I have some place where I can put these escapologists without continually worrying about them. I have accordingly lined the back of each kennel with flat galvanised sheeting, insulating the space between the two walls with dry sawdust, and the fronts, doors and divisions are made of a strong galvanised woven wire, two-inch square mesh, which I believe even the strongest and most determined dog will be unable to bend. The tops of the whole range are going to be covered in with strong gauge wire, and at least two of them will have extra protection above with either sheet iron or more woven wire.

The chewers will still have some timber to play with unfortunately, for I have had to use wooden framework, but in due course I hope to get this covered with zinc sheeting, and also the benches will ultimately be protected in this way. One of these kennels is already in use at the time of writing, and it was interesting to watch unobserved the reactions of one of the labrador escapologists which I put in to it. She just could not believe that she was beaten, but after a couple of days she accepted the situation, and is no doubt reserving her energies for such a time as I am forgetful enough to place her in a less secure abode.

The McNeill Spaniel Handlers' Cup

I regret the delay this season in dealing with the McNeill Spaniel Handlers' Cup, which has been due to my own two recent indispositions and pressure of work. However, points have now been awarded to the only three handlers who sent in their lists of awards—a record low due, no doubt, to the chaotic conditions existing for spaniel trials last season owing to myxomatosis and the cancellation of many events. It gives me very great pleasure to record that the winner for the season 1954-55 is that great spaniel trainer and handler, veteran John Forbes, recently of the Skirrid Kennels, Abergavenny, and now living at North Farm, Snetterton, near Norwich. Mr. Forbes collected a total of 59 points, and his list reads seven first prizes, three seconds, two thirds and six certificates or awards of honour, a very impressive record, and one which includes the first prize in the cocker stake at the Spaniel Championship with F.T.Ch. Buoy of Elan, owned by Lt.-Cdr. E. A. J. Collard.

Five different dogs helped Mr. Forbes to collect his points, two cockers, one English springer and two Welsh springers. Mr. Forbes has won this cup at least once before in recent years, and it is especially fitting that he should top the list this season as he is now giving up public training and is in semi-retirement. Mr. Forbes tells me that he will in future be training a few dogs for Commander Collard, and readers will join me in congratulating him and wishing him health and happiness in the future. We all hope that he will not be absent from the field trial scene, for Mr. Forbes towers above most of us not only in physique but in knowledge and that very desirable attribute, a sense of sportsmanship and fair play. As a judge or as a handler, Mr. Forbes is easy-going, sympathetic, understanding and knowledgeable and has long been one of the most popular figures wherever gundog people foregather.

The runner-up for the McNeill Spaniel Handlers' Cup was Keith Chudley, of Harpersbrook Kennels, Brigstock, Northants, who won the cup last year. Keith had a total of 48 points, made up of one first prize, two seconds, four thirds, two reserves and 19 certificates of merit and awards of honour. Five dogs were concerned in this record, and I congratulate Keith on once again proving his ability in the spaniel field. His brother, Jack Chudley, scored a total of 39 points, thus still further adding to the prestige of the Harpersbrook Kennels.

Working Tests of U.R.C.

The United Retriver Club (South Oxon Branch) held very successful Gundog Working Tests at Wycombe Abbey, High Wycombe, on April 3, when the judge was Mr. A. E. (Jack) Curtis. Though the weather was chilly there was a well filled card of competitors, and a good crowd of spectators, and the standard of work was extremely high.

Awards. Puppy and Novice Stake (16 dogs): 1, Major Grant's labrador Yankee Pat (N.A.F.), (M. J. E. Cox); 2, Mr. C. J. Shelton's labrador Hazelgrove Jane; 3, Mr. C. F. Cowper's labrador Kingcolt Black Orchid. Reserve, Mr. C. J. Shelton's labrador Lady Jasmine. Open Stake: 1, Lord Carrington's labrador Cedar of Bledlow (J. E. Cox); 2, Mr. Shelton's Hazelgrove Jane; 3, The Hon. John Grimston's labrador Gorhambury Mingo (F. Cockayne). Reserve, Lord Carrington's labrador Templegrove Frolic (J. E. Cox).

In the Kitchen

By PENELOPE TURING

IN the spring, in the absence of game perhaps some recipes for the angler will not come amiss. Here are three for salmon and trout: two very simple; one rather more elaborate.

Steamed salmon. Take a piece of salmon, about 12oz., wipe it and season with pepper and salt. Then pour a little salad oil into a basin, add the fish and pour over it a little more oil and a squeeze of lemon juice. Cover with greased paper and cook in a steamer over boiling water for twenty minutes. Serve on a hot dish with the oil, and garnish with thin slices of cucumber.

Fried trout. Clean and dry some small trout, season with pepper and salt and roll them in flour. Melt some butter or margarine in a frying pan and when very hot fry the fish until golden on both sides, but not browned. Drain them, place on a hot dish and sprinkle with chopped parsley and a little lemon juice. Melt some butter and when foaming and slightly browned pour over the trout and serve at once.

Stuffed trout. For this a large trout is needed. Cut off the head, clean, and remove the backbone. Then stuff the fish with very finely chopped mushrooms and—if available—truffles, mixed with pepper, salt and butter. Sew it up and cook in boiling water with one onion and two carrots sliced. When cooked drain the fish, let it cool, roll in seasoned flour and egg, and fry in olive oil. Drain and serve with Hollandaise sauce.

Wildfowling Clubs

The annual general meeting of The South Lincolnshire Wildfowlers' Club was held at the Club headquarters, the Red Cow Hotel, Boston, on March 12. Mr. P. C. Smith was in the chair, supported by Mr. C. Hewson (treasurer), Mr. R. S. Marshall (assistant secretary), and 39 members. An apology for absence was received from Mr. J. R. Marshall (secretary). Two new members were enrolled. The minutes of the annual general meeting held on March 6 were read, approved, and signed.

Mr. P. C. Smith thanked all the officers, committee and members for their support during the past year and for the work they had done. He stated that the secretary's report would cover all activities of the club, but he would like to remark upon the very interesting meetings they had enjoyed, particularly in regard to the visiting speakers. The chairman said the club was far stronger now than ever before, and he sincerely hoped we should continue to gain strength during the coming year.

The assistant secretary, read the report in which he gave a brief resume of the activities of the past year. He said that membership had increased and at the close of the year we had 98 paid-up members. The monthly meetings had been quite well attended, particularly when we had speakers which was the case on four occasions—the speakers being Mr. Mackenzie Thorpe; our president, Mr. C. Hodgkinson; Mr. Sid Bellamy, president of the North Lincs. Wildfowlers Club; Mr. R. E. M. Pilcher. After his most interesting talk, Mr. Pilcher, who lives in Boston, was asked if he would become a vice-president of the club, and he replied that he would be honoured to accept this invitation. Another vice-president was elected, Mr. A. Simmonds of the Red Cow Hotel, who the secretary said, kindly arranged the room, and let us have it free of charge. A vote of thanks to Mr. Simmonds was unanimously recorded. The clay pigeon shoots had not been particularly well attended, but those members who did avail themselves of this opportunity for some practice, greatly enjoyed themselves. The secretary also remarked upon the formation of The South Lincolnshire Wildfowlers' Club (Wainfleet Branch).

The secretary's report stated that the club had been in close touch with the local councils throughout the year, and had been advised of two matters of interest to wildfowlers, namely the interest of the Nature Conservancy in Freiston shore, and the locking of a gate giving access to Frampton Marsh. Both these matters had been discussed with the Holland County Council, and a satisfactory result had been experienced. Like the chairman the secretary hoped that the club would prosper in the coming year.

The treasurer reported a very satisfactory financial position, with a substantial balance in the bank. We have purchased a double clay pigeon trap for use at the clay pigeon shoots, and for the use of individual members if they so desire to do so, providing they make good any damage caused.

The following officers were elected: Chairman, Mr. P. C. Smith; vice-chairman, Mr. E. Cane; secretary, Mr. J. R. Marshall; treasurer, C. Hewson; assistant secretary, R. S. Marshall. Executive committee (three members): Re-elected en bloc, viz., Messrs. D. B. Sumpter, B. Stringer, R. Fox. Entertainment committee (three members): Messrs. E. Slingsby, D. Lord, and D. B. Sumpter were elected when it was proposed that the entertainment committee comprise of five members, and this being carried, a further two members were elected, namely Messrs. T. Dawson and R. Mumford.

Mr. C. Hewson (treasurer) proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. J. R. Marshall (secretary) for his hard work during the past year for the interests of S.L.W.C. and wished him much success and wishes upon the occasion of his recent marriage. It was also proposed by the treasurer that the club present the secretary with a worthwhile wedding gift in appreciation of his services to the club. After much discussion it was agreed that the club purchase a picture of wildfowl and present it to the secretary. It was proposed, and unanimously agreed that the subscription remain at 10s. per annum, and all members present agreed that they received excellent value for their subscription. It was also suggested that if the financial statement would allow, the club might assist with the cost of the clay pigeon shoots.

It was agreed that the monthly meetings be continued, and the usual clay pigeon shoots to be arranged during the summer months.

Mr. T. Dawson reported that he had conferred with the Boston Borough Surveyor in regard to a pen being made available, preferably in Boston Central Park, for the suggested wildfowl collection. The Borough Surveyor considered the idea an excellent one, and agreed to discuss the matter with the chairman of the Parks Committee after which he would report back to us.

In regard to the rearing of mallard, it was suggested that the Club take over one or more suitable pits and leave unshot for a number of seasons, at the same time, giving every encouragement for duck to breed there. This was considered a very worthwhile suggestion which will be examined more fully. In the meantime, any hand-rearing which could be practiced this season should be carried out.

* * *

The members and friends of The South Lincolnshire Wildfowlers' Club held their second annual dinner at the Peacock and Royal Hotel, Boston. It was decided this year to hold a "stag" dinner, with a view to attracting more actual club members than the previous year. However, this was not the case, but the members and friends attending enjoyed a very nice dinner of roast duck and all the trimmings. The toastmaster was the club secretary, Mr. J. R. Marshall, and he proposed the Loyal toast. The toast to the club was proposed by Mr. T. Dawson, Agricultural Advisory Officer, and was responded by Mr. R. S. Marshall, assistant secretary.

At the conclusion of the dinner, the members retired to the lounge-bar, and was entertained by Mr. Johnny James of Skegness and Mr. Harold Buttery, Boston.

* * *

The Preston and District Wildfowlers' Association held their first practice Clay Pigeon Shoot on April 2. Despite the rain, the shoot was very well attended. Stanley Bamber, the international clay pigeon shot acted as coach, and all members agreed that their shooting had improved under his tuition.

We have our own shooting ground, traps, etc., and clay bird shooting will carry on until the shooting season starts. All arrangements for hatching our own duck are made, and we have the full co-operation of the local police in protecting our marsh and sanctuary against poachers and out-of-season shooting.

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